WALTHER, THE PREACHER

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Practical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology

---

by

Henry J. Eggold, Jr.

May 1962

CORDIA THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY LIBRARY
SPRINGFIELD, ILLINOIS

18486

Approved by: Richard R. Caemmerer
Advisor

George W. Hoyer
Reader

E. C. Fuerbringer
Reader

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS		iii
Chapter		
I.	WALTHER, A GIANT IN LUTHERANISM	1
II.	THE MILIEU OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	5
III.	FORMATIVE INFLUENCES IN THE LIFE OF C. F. W. WALTHER	14
IV.	WALTHER'S VIEW OF THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE SERMON	41
V.	THEOLOGICAL ACCENTS IN WALTHER'S PREACHING . .	72
VI.	THE TIMELINESS OF WALTHER'S PREACHING	156
VII.	THE USE OF THE WORD FOR CORRECTING AN UNGODLY LIFE	178
VIII.	THE USE OF THE WORD FOR ENCOURAGING TO A GODLY LIFE	192
IX.	THE USE OF THE WORD FOR COMFORT	206
X.	THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TEXT AND THE SERMON	211
XI.	THE STYLE OF THE SERMON	225
XII.	WALTHER IN THE PULPIT	249
XIII.	WALTHER IN RETROSPECT	254
BIBLIOGRAPHY		258

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure Page

1. Sample of Walther's Sermon Manuscript 227

CHAPTER I

WALTHER, A GIANT IN LUTHERANISM

Dr. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, the subject of this dissertation, is one of the giants of the Lutheran Church in the nineteenth century and a guiding spirit still in the theology and practice of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod.

Born October 25, 1811, in Langenchursdorf, Germany, Walther distinguished himself in his seventy-six year career as a pastor, churchman, theological professor, and writer.

One among the 665 immigrants who fled Germany in 1838 because of religious oppression, Walther soon became the commanding figure of the small band of Saxons. In 1841, he assumed the pastorate of Trinity congregation in St. Louis, a position which he held for forty-six years. During his lifetime the mother church of St. Louis fostered three daughter congregations, Immanuel, Holy Cross, and Zion. In 1849 he was elected to a professorship of Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, serving in this capacity for thirty-seven years.

With an intense desire to unite with fellow Lutherans in America, Walther published the first issue of Der Lutheraner, September 7, 1844, in which he appealed to like-minded pastors and congregations to join forces. He saw the

fruit of his labors in the founding of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States, in April, 1847. Recognized for his leadership ability Walther was elected the Synod's first president. He served in this capacity from 1847-1850 and again from 1864-1878. His continuing efforts to unite the Lutherans of America culminated in the formation of the Synodical Conference, in 1872, composed of the synods of Ohio, Missouri, Wisconsin, Illinois, and the Norwegian Synod. Walther served this federation as its first president.

In his literary career, Walther not only contributed articles to Der Lutheraner over a period of forty years, but also since 1855 wrote extensively for Lehre und Wehre, a theological journal. His classic work, concerned with the proper distinction of Law and Gospel, is entitled Gesetz und Evangelium.

Together with all of his other achievements, Walther is remembered today also as a preacher of the first rank. And it is to an examination of Walther's preaching that this thesis addresses itself. In the course of the following pages I shall endeavor to demonstrate the validity of the thesis suggested by Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Jr. that Walther as preacher represents a synthesis of Orthodoxy and Pietism.[1]

---

[1]Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Jr., "Amerikanisches Luthertum in dogmengeschichtlicher Sicht," Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, VI (July 25, 1952), 250-251.

Chapter II of the thesis attempts to show that Orthodoxy and Pietism joined forces in opposing Rationalism in the early decades of the nineteenth century, in the period known as the Erweckung. Chapter III demonstrates that Orthodoxy and Pietism played an important role in Walther's formative years. Chapter IV provides the background of Walther's stated homiletical principles, against which his sermons are to be judged. Chapters V-IX of the thesis reflect the influences of Orthodoxy and Pietism in Walther's preaching. It should be noted that although Walther retained the basic theological accents of Orthodoxy, he renounced the subjectivism of Pietism, retained its emphasis on faith as a living force in life and, unfortunately, some of its legalism. Chapters X-XII complete the portrait of Walther the preacher, emphasizing in turn his use of the text in preaching, his style, and his pulpit manner.

Original source materials for the paper include eight volumes of his printed sermons and other sermons printed individually. Supplementary source materials include his Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie,[2] Gesetz und Evangelium,[3] and his Briefe.[4]

---

[2]C. F. W. Walther, Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten, 1872).

[3]C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, translated from the German of 1897 by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929).

[4]Briefe von C. F. W. Walther, edited by L. Fuerbringer. 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1915).

CHAPTER II

THE MILIEU OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Every great man in a real sense is a product of his age. His greatness lies in his ability to take the resources of his time and of them to fashion a better way of life. For example, one cannot adequately assess the work of Luther without taking into consideration the Renaissance and the work of the pre-reformers. Similarly, also, to understand Walther one must understand something of the soil from which he grew.

The nineteenth century, one of the great centuries in history, represents the confluence of three significant forces in religious thought: Orthodoxy, Pietism, and Rationalism. Following hard upon the labors of Luther and Melanchthon, the leaders of the age of Orthodoxy performed the necessary work of systematizing Lutheran theology. Men like Martin Chemnitz, Johann Andreas Quenstedt, Johann Gerhard, and Abraham Calov addressed themselves to the task of classifying under appropriate heads and in minute detail the doctrines of Holy Scripture. Their primary concern was for the correctness of truth as opposed to all forms of error.

In the approach to theology in the Age of Orthodoxy lay certain weaknesses. One was that theology could easily become a mere form; another was that faith could easily become

identified in the popular mind with assent to doctrine.

Pietism seized upon these weaknesses and the pendulum swung from the extreme of cold objectivity to a maudlin subjectivity that elevated feeling over the Word. Phillip Spener (1635-1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) launched their attack against the formalism in the Church. Their complaint was ". . . that Lutheranism in the form of the orthodoxy of the age had lost the living power of the Reformers and was in danger of burying its talent in dead and barren service to the letter."[1] Their program was to substitute for the orthodox theology a theology of the heart, and for the bare acceptance of faith, a life of faith as evidence of its genuineness.

Since Walther represents a synthesis between Orthodoxy and Pietism, it will be helpful at this juncture to pause to contrast Orthodoxyand Pietism on a number of doctrinal and practical points.

Orthodoxy taught regeneration through Baptism and through the preached Word through the power of the Holy Spirit. Pietism held that regeneration occurs later in life, involving a spiritual struggle. Those who could not tell of struggles were unconverted.[2] Hence, Pietists tended to view

---

[1]Johann Heinrich Kurtz, Church History, translated from the German by the Rev. John Macpherson (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1890), III, 41-42.

[2]F. Bente, American Lutheranism (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919), I, 73.

regeneration as a human achievement. They distinguished three kinds of people: unconverted, awakened, and converted, the awakened being basically unconverted.[3] Thesis XXII of Gesetz und Evangelium is aimed at this perversion:

> The Word of God is not properly divided when a false distinction is made between spiritual awakening and conversion; or when a person's not being able to believe is interpreted as though he were not permitted to believe.[4]

Orthodoxy taught justification by grace alone by faith alone. Pietism held that only a living faith justifies. Justification must be supported by works, such as, repentance, conversion and a changed life. Their view tended to blur the distinction between justification and sanctification. In their view sanctification is not contained in but is added to faith.[5]

At times adding other marks, Orthodoxy generally held that the Word and the Sacraments are marks of the Church. Pietism held that individual believers determine the character and existence of the Church. The revived and the awakened are regarded as the real Church.

On the doctrine of the ministry, Orthodoxy held that the faith of the administrant does not affect the efficacy of the means of grace. Pietism held that the preaching of

---

[3] "The Orthodox Teacher and the Word of God," The Cresset, XXV (March, 1962), 18.

[4] C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, translated from the German by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), p. 249.

[5] Bente, op. cit., p. 73.

unconverted men could produce no saving results.

Orthodoxy held that the forgiveness of sins was to be proclaimed both through the public preaching and through private absolution. Pietism held that it was dangerous to preach the forgiveness of sins because it quieted consciences and made secure sinners. The afflicted were directed not to grace but to the pulse of their own piety. And the assurance of forgiveness was not based upon the objective Word but on the subjective marks. Quite consistently, Pietism also rejected private absolution.

Orthodoxy regarded amusements as indifferent things. Pietism tended to be legalistic, condemning dancing, the theater, and card playing as detrimental to progress in sanctification.

Orthodoxy accepted the Lutheran Confessions. Spener also accepted them, but later Pietism rejected them as man's work.

In addition, Pietism stressed Bible study, the moral life, and practical philanthropy. Under its influence there was a revival of dynamic preaching and a renewal of lay activity in the church.[6] In Frankfurt, Spener also established conventicles in which the pious could discuss the Bible and reflect emotionally on their inner experiences.

Like Orthodoxy, Pietism, too, had within it the seeds

---

[6]Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 10.

of its own decay. Through its deprecation of doctrine and its exaltation of morality, Pietism paved the way for Rationalism which made morality the end of existence. Pietism's subjectivity in exalted feeling over doctrine easily led to Rationalism's exaltation of reason over revelation.

Rationalism had its hey-day in the eighteenth century, the "dark age of Protestantism."[7] The Enlightenment believed that

> the universe was guided by immutable natural laws which reason could discover and that constant advancement in the discovery of these laws could not fail to produce the progressive betterment of mankind from era to era.[8]

Destructive criticism had its day with Paulus of Jena explaining away the supernatural in the New Testament and Eichhorn of Goettingen doing the same for the Old Testament. Preaching, too, fell under the spell of Rationalism. Bizarre sermon themes like "Danger of being Buried Alive" and "The Fear of Ghosts" were considered appropriate for Easter.[9] Sihler characterizes the preaching of von Ammon in Dresden as "a stale dish of heathen hash, garnished with a little Christian sauce."[10] The epitaph of Johann Joachim Zolikofer bears mute testimony to the poverty of the pulpit

---

[7]Edwin Charles Dargan, A History of Preaching (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954), II, 187.

[8]Forster, op. cit., p. 10.

[9]Dargan, op. cit., p. 210.

[10]Wilhelm Sihler, Lebenslauf von W. Sihler (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1879), I, 91.

in the Age of Enlightenment: "He lives on here in his influence, and there in a sphere of souls where Socrates and Jesus live."[11]

But truth crushed to earth will rise again. As the nineteenth century dawned, Pietism and Orthodoxy joined forces in opposing Rationalism. Latourette describes the theological revolt, called the Erweckung, thus:

> The awakenings in Germany were predominantly indigenous and took distinctively German forms. They were extremely varied, but from multiform Pietism and from a resurgence of Lutheran confessionalism, with emphasis on the historic symbols and with fresh expressions. They had in common the rejection of the rationalism of the Aufklaerung and of much of the current attempt to adjust theology and Biblical scholarship to the revolutionary currents of the day; they were conservative, at times militantly so. Both the revived Lutheran confessionalism and Pietism were allied with orthodoxy.[12]

Particularly two groups aided the cause of the Erweckung. One was the German Society for the Promotion of Pure Doctrine and Holy Life. Of this group Mundinger says:

> The branch office at Dresden, over which Pastor Martin Stephan gained control in the 1820's was a kind of branch office for all Saxony.[13]

The second organization was the Herrnhuter Diaspora whom Count von Zinzendorf gave refuge on his estates in Saxony.

---

[11]Dargan, op. cit., p. 225.

[12]Kenneth Scott Latourette, The Nineteenth Century in Europe, in Christianity in a Revolutionary Age (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), II, 75.

[13]Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 22, n. 10.

This group carried on evangelistic work in Christian and heathen lands. Pietism, which had not been driven out of the evangelical churches during the siege of Rationalism, found refuge and support in the community of the Moravian Brethren.[14]

Books and newspapers, too, aided the cause of the Erweckung. Schleiermacher, though intellectually on the side of Rationalism, made a profound impression on Germany in 1799 with his Discourses on Religion, with its theme of the feeling of dependence on God.[15] In the rising tide of the Erweckung conservative pastors also began to speak out. Hengstenberg (1802-1869) set forth a system of theology unmodified by Rationalism and Naturalism in his Evangelische Kirchenzeitung, founded 1827. August Hahn of the Leipzig faculty, denounced Rationalism and demanded that rationalists be put out of the church. In Dresden, in February, 1832, pamphlets were distributed which proclaimed that Rationalism was dead.[16] Andreas Gottlob Rudelbach (1792-1862), the most learned theologian of his age next to Baur[17] and superintendent of the Consistorialrat in Glauchau, Saxony, wrote masterpieces of Lutheran theology in Grundvig's Theologisk Maanedskrift and in Hengstenberg's Evangelische

---

[14]Kurtz, op. cit., pp. 175-176.

[15]Dargan, op. cit., p. 376.

[16]Mundinger, op. cit., p. 24.

[17]Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Walther and the Lutheran Symbols," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (October, 1961), 607.

Kirchenzeitung. In 1840, he, together with Heinrich Ernst Ferdinand Guericke (1803-1878), who was deposed from his professorship at Halle because he opposed the Prussian Union, published the Leipzig Zeitschrift fuer die gesamte Lutherische Theologie und Kirche. Philippi (1809-1882) reproduced the Lutheran theology of the seventeenth century. Adolf Harless (1806-1879) also spoke for confessional Lutheranism, founding in 1838 Zeitschrift fuer Protestantismus und Kirche. Other leaders in the Erweckung were: Johann Gottfried Scheibel (1783-1843), deposed as professor and preacher at Breslau for refusing to receive the Lord's Supper together with the Reformed; Wilhelm Christian Sartorius (1797-1859); Wilhelm Friedrich Hoefling (1802-1853), of Erlangen; Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875); August Friedrich Christian Vilmar (1800-1868), of Erlangen; Otto Kirsten Krabbe (1805-1873), of Rostock; Johann Conrad Wilhelm Loehe (1808-1872), the great benefactor of the Missouri Synod; Theodore Kliefoth (1810-1895); Carl Paul Caspari (1814-1892); Frances Hermann Reinhold von Frank (1827-1892);[22] and Franz Delitzsch, Hebrew scholar, friend of Walther, and Stephanite who left the movement at the time of the emigration.[23]

Although men of position and influence raised their voices in a growing cry of opposition against Rationalism, Forster

---

[22]Ibid., pp. 607-608.

[23]Forster, op. cit., p. 20.

contends that in the Erweckung the strongest force opposing Rationalism came from the laity.[20] Their big question of a preacher was: Does he preach the forgiveness of sin through the blood of Christ?[21]

Three popular preachers who arose to satisfy the needs of the people were Ludwig Harms, Claus Harms and Martin Stephan. Ludwig Harms, whom Uhlhorn calls the greatest Volksprediger since Luther, centers his sermons around three basic themes: the need of conversion; justification by faith; and the manifestation of faith in the Christian life.[22] Claus Harms (1778-1855) is best remembered for his ninety-five theses written not only against Rationalism but also against the Prussian Union, which attempted to force by law the union of Lutherans and Calvinists.[23] The third popular

---

[20] Ibid., p. 14.

[21] Friedrich Uhlhorn, Geschichte der deutsch-Lutherische Kirche (Leipzig: Verlag von Doerffling und Franke, 1911), II, 131.

[22] Ibid., p. 143. This statement is significant, because these are also Walther's themes. This fact helps to demonstrate that Walther was a creature of his times.

[23] Following the throwing off of the yoke of Napoleon, a wave of nationalism swept over Germany, reflecting itself in an attempt to unite all shades of belief in one church. This fact is important for understanding the oppression to which the Saxons were subjected. It is significant to note that there was no love lost between the Lutherans and Calvinists. "Sooner Papist than Calvinist" was a popular saying in Saxony, according to James Hastings Nichols, History of Christianity 1650-1950 (New York: The Ronald Press Company 1956), p. 43. "In Saxony and Silesia there was a peculiarly doctrinaire brand of Lutheran orthodoxy which still considered all Calvinists heathen in the bitter traditional sense of the seventeenth century." Ibid., p. 156.

preacher was Martin Stephan, the father confessor of all of Saxony. But more about Stephan later.

This historical survey accents a number of most significant points for a proper evaluation of the Saxon immigration and particularly of the life and thought of C. F. W. Walther. Though Pietism and Orthodoxy went underground during the eighteenth century, they by no means died, but arose in a virile manner in the period of the Erweckung. It would be strange indeed if these two forces in theology should leave Walther untouched. That they did not, but that instead his theological thought world represents a synthesis of Orthodoxy and Pietism is the subject of the next chapter.

Secondly, it should be evident that the Saxon emigration was not prompted by a spirit which was sui generis. It was a part of a much larger spirit of revolt which was seething in Saxony. Piepkorn's conclusion, therefore, is eminently correct when he says of Walther: "Militant his voice is, but it is not a lonely voice. Rather it is the voice in a great chorus."[24]

But a mighty voice it was. How it developed from its first incoherent wail to its certain sound of maturity is the task to which we now address ourselves.

---

[24]Piepkorn, op. cit., p. 609.

CHAPTER III

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES IN THE LIFE OF C. F. W. WALTHER

On October 25, 1811, just two years before Napoleon Bonaparte met his first defeat in the Battle of Leipzig, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther was born to Pastor Gottlob Heinrich Walther and Johanna Wilhelmina nee Zschenderlein. He was the fourth son and the eighth child in a family of twelve children.[1]

Walther himself tells us that he came from a long line of preachers:

> My great-grandfather, Moritz Heinrich Walther, of Gladua, near Magdeburg, was pastor at Oberlungwitz from 1719 to 1752. . . . His son, my grandfather, was Adolph Heinrich Walther, . . . since 1763 pastor at Langenchursdorf. . . . My father, Gottlob Heinrich Walther, was pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran church at Langenchursdorf.[2]

---

[1]Martin Guenther, Dr. C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1890), pp. 1-2. His eldest brother died in infancy; a second, at the age of six. His younger sister, Amalie Ernstine, married E. G. W. Keyl, first Missouri Synod pastor in Baltimore, Maryland. D. H. Steffens, Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), pp. 12-13.

[2]Guenther, op. cit., p. 1. Walther notes also that his great-grandfather was a chiliast. Ibid.

Within eight days after his birth, he was baptized in the Lutheran Church according to law.[3] The first name he bore in his youth was not Carl nor Wilhelm, but Ferdinand.[4]

Walther's home life does not appear to have been the predominant influence of his life. He tells us that all the children had a profound respect for their father, for they hardly dared to look him in the eye.[5] One incident which left a lasting impression on Walther occurred when he was three years old. At Christmas he tells us that he recited the poem for Pelznickel (St. Nicholas), "Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness," and received a dreier from his pleased father.[6] Strange as it seems to us, Walther did not own a Bible until he purchased one as a student at Leipzig. He says:

> I was eighteen years old when I left the Gymnasium, and I had never heard from believing lips a sentence taken from God's Word. I had never had a Bible nor a Catechism, but a miserable manual, which contained

---

[3]Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 26.

[4]Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer, 80 Eventful Years (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), p. 81. Responding to Emilie Buenger's letter in which she accepts his proposal for marriage, Walther signs the letter "Ihr Ferdinand." Briefe von C. F. W. Walther, edited by L. Fuerbringer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1915), I, 5. Hereafter this work is referred to as Briefe.

[5]Guenther, op. cit., p. 3.

[6]Ibid., p. 4.

heathen morality.[7]

Walther thanks his father for teaching him that the Bible is God's Word, but adds that as a child in his father's house he was still unconverted.

> My dear, God-fearing father taught me from little on that the Bible is God's Word. But very soon I left my father's house--already in my eighth year--and came into unbelieving circles. I did not lose my historic faith. It led me through life like an angel of God. But I spent my eight years at the Gymnasium unconverted.[8]

As a lad Walther attended the local Volksschule, under the supervision of the pastor and supported by the school community (Schulgemeinde). His courses included Luther's Small Catechism, Bible and hymnbook, reading, writing, and arithmetic.[9] At the age of eight, he attended the city school in Hohenstein[10] where he studied until 1821. From July, 1821, until September 23, 1829, Walther attended the Gymnasium at Schneeberg, of which his brother-in-law, the learned Magister H. F. W. Schubert, was Corrector (associate director).[11] Here Latin, Greek, and Hebrew were the chief

---

[7]Fuenfzehnter Synodal-Bericht der Allgemeinen Deutschen Evang.-Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten vom Jahre 1872 (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1872), p. 69.

[8]Guenther, op. cit., p. 5.

[9]Mundinger, op. cit., p. 27.

[10]J. L. Gruber, Erinnerungen an Professor C. F. W. Walther und seine Zeit (Burlington: Lutheran Literary Board, n.d.), p. 4.

[11]Ibid.

courses.[12] All of his teachers at the Gymnasium except one were Rationalists.[13] And Walther was still unconverted.

On February 8, 1829, Walther wrote in his diary: "I feel myself born for nothing else except music."[14] When he told his father about his desire to study music, the latter replied:

> If you want to be a musician, you will have to see to it how you can manage. However, if you want to study theology, I will give you a thaler each week.[15]

Walther's thoughts turned from music to theology, not so much from the promise of the thaler per week as from his reading of the biography of J. F. Oberlin by G. H. Schubert. Walther wrote in his diary:

---

[12]Mundinger, op. cit., p. 27.

[13]Guenther, op. cit., p. 5.

[14]Ibid., p. 6.

[15]Ibid. A number of biographers praise Walther's musical talent. Fuerbringer, op. cit., p. 88, remarks: "In my student days he often, almost regularly, played the organ in Holy Cross Church for the 'Hauptlied,' or sermon hymn, to be sung by the congregation. The organ at that time was a rather poor instrument, but Walther certainly knew how to make the best of it. He played without notes, entered into the specific character of the choral, so that everyone was impressed not only by his preludes and interludes . . . but especially by his leading the congregation to sing the choral as it should be sung." Gruber, op. cit., p. 11, adds: "His improvisations were in good taste, and he played them elegantly well and without mistake." For some of his hymns and poetry, see Guenther, op. cit., pp. 237-256. On April 8, 1860, when Walther was on the high seas on his trip to Europe to recuperate, he composed the great Easter hymn, "Erstanden, erstanden ist Jesus Christ." The hymn with his tune is number 198 in The Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921).

> I am living quite happy and philosophizing with my brother about the most interesting occurrences of our lives, and reading with real greed the life of Pastor Oberlin, by Schubert; this has filled my whole being and shown that the prospects which a theologian may have are the most beautiful, inasmuch as he, if he only will, can create for himself a field of opportunity such as no other man, who chooses some other calling, may ever hope for. The anxious doubt, "Will you then some day secure an adequate support?" is now completely overcome; for I have imbibed out of this most precious book an immovable confidence in God and a firm faith in His providence and its workings upon our destiny, after I saw this awakened through the conversations with my dear, good brother.[16]

Graduating from Schneeberg "especially worthy" (*imprimiis dignus*)[17] Walther accompanied his next older brother, Otto Herman, to Leipzig University, October, 1829, to begin the study of theology. His three year course of study included dogmatics, symbolics, history, homiletics, exegesis, pedagogy, pastoral theology, logic, and metaphysics.[18]

When Walther entered the university his knowledge of the Scriptures was pitifully weak. He himself testifies:

> When I entered the university, I did not know the Ten Commandments by heart and could not recite the list of the books of the Bible. My knowledge of the Bible was pitiful, and I had not an inkling of faith.[19]

To remedy that situation, Walther, on December 9, 1829,

---

[16]Guenther, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

[17]Steffens, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

[18]Mundinger, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

[19]C. F. W. Walther, *The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel*, translated from the German by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), p. 141. Hereafter this work is referred to as *Law and Gospel*.

used his last thaler to purchase a copy of the Scriptures.[20] Like Luther, he began an intensive searching of the Scriptures. He wrote in his diary:

> Today I read in the Bible, namely, in the Book of Acts, first in order to orient myself somewhat in it, for as yet I know very little about the apostles, and I can hardly repeat their twelve names; secondly, to edify myself by the examples of the workings and manifestations of an unmovable faith.[21]

Leipzig University at that time was thoroughly Rationalistic. Walther says that

> When Buenger came to Leipzig in 1829, things were in a sad way, as in all of Saxony, with respect to true Christian faith. For many years Rationalism, unbelief, the Aufklaerung, and wretched twisting of Scripture poured forth from this university over all of Saxony its streams of poison.[22]

The called professors at Leipzig at that time were: A. Hahn, F. W. Lindner, J. A. H. Tittman, K. G. W. Thiele, Illgen, Winzer, Goldhorn, and later Niedner and Winer. Of these, all were gross Rationalists except Hahn, Lindner and Tittman. However, Lindner wrote a book against the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper.[23]

Offended by the Rationalism of the university, a group

---

[20]Guenther, op. cit., p. 7, tells us that later that same day a farmer came from Langenchursdorf with the gift of an extra thaler from his father.

[21]Ibid., p. 9.

[22]C. F. W. Walther, Kurzer Lebenslauf des weiland ehrwuerdiger Pastor Joh. Friedr. Buenger (St. Louis: Verlag von F. Dette, 1882), pp. 9-10. Hereafter this work is referred to as Lebenslauf.

[23]Ibid.

of like-minded students had formed a circle, called the collegium philobiblicum. For a time Professor Lindner, after the manner of August Hermann Francke, led the group, interpreting the Scriptures in an edifying manner and indicating practical sermon themes on the basis of the text.[24]

Shortly after Walther enrolled at the university, his brother introduced him to the group. Among the members were the following who later emigrated to America: Brohm, J. F. Buenger, O. Fuerbringer, and Carl Ludwig Geyer.[25]

Walther counted his early association with this group a distinct blessing.

> Lo and behold! It was there that God began to work on my soul by means of His Word. In a short time I had really become a child of God, a believer, who trusted in His grace. Of course, I was not deeply grounded.[26]

To deepen his spiritual knowledge, Walther discontinued attending St. Peter's Church, F. A. Wolf, Pastor, and began to attend the church of an orphanage. There he heard the preaching of F. M. Haensel, whose sermons were

---

[24] Ibid., p. 11.

[25] A. C. Stellhorn, "Carl Ludwig Geyer," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XII (April, 1939), 4-5. Loeber attended Jena and Sihler, Berlin. Mundinger, op. cit., p. 27.

[26] Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 141.

less elegant and spirited than Wolf's, but richer in Biblical content.[27]

Needless to say, Walther and his companions suffered persecution. The other students thought them crazy and shunned them as they would people afflicted with a contagious disease.[28]

> Mystics, as believers in Saxony were called, Pietists, pious folks, obscurantists, and children of darkness, were not the most opprobrious titles given these students. Either hated as despised hypocrites or pitied as unfortunately misguided religious enthusiasts, they were despised by the unbelieving world and at times even by their nearest relatives. Nevertheless, they were inwardly happy in their God and Savior, and all who remained faithful looked back upon the time of their first love as the most blessed of their whole life.[29]

Things went well until an old candidate of theology, named Kuehn, took over the leadership of the circle. Walther calls him a genuine Pietist.[30] He had come to the assurance of faith only after long and fierce fighting under the awful terror of the law and sought to lead others over the same route. He contended that faith did not rest on firm ground until one "had experienced a high degree of contrition and genuine fear of hell in the struggles of repentance."[31] Here is how Walther describes Kuehn's approach and his reaction

---

[27]Walther, Lebenslauf, p. 16.

[28]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 142.

[29]Walther, Lebenslauf, p. 11.

[30]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 142.

[31]Walther, Lebenslauf, p. 12.

to it:

> Now this candidate who came to us said: "You imagine that you are converted Christians, don't you? But you are not. You have not yet passed through any real penitential agony." I fought this view day and night, thinking at first that he meant to take us from under the sway of the Gospel and put us back under the Law. But he kept repeating his assertion until I finally began to ask myself whether I was really a Christian. At first I felt so happy, believing in my Lord Jesus Christ; now there began for me a period of the severest spiritual affliction.[32]

Kuehn urged upon the group the reading of Pietistic literature. Books by Johann Arndt, August Hermann Francke, C. H. von Bogatsky, Spener, Werner, J. C. Schade, Jac. Rambach, Steinmetz, J. Ph. Fresenius were popular.[33] Walther recalls particularly the volume by Fresenius, Book on Confession and Communion, which gave three rules which could lead the sinner to assurance: (1) pray for grace; (2) be watchful lest you lose grace; (3) meditate upon the Word of God in a proper manner.[34] Recalling this period of bibliotherapy, Walther says:

> At that time, when opening any religious book treating of the order of grace and salvation, I would read only the chapter on repentance. When I would come to the chapters on the Gospel and faith, I would close the book, saying, "This is not for me." An increasing darkness settled on my soul as I tasted less and less of the sweetness of the Gospel. God knows I did not mean to work a delusion on myself; I wanted to be saved. In those days I regarded those as the best books which spoke a stern language to sinners and left

---

[32]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 142.

[33]Guenther, op. cit., p. 9.

[34]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 146.

them nothing of the grace of God.[35]

Walther, like Luther, sought for peace in vain. Working on the Pietistic principle that people should be warned against believing too soon, Walther says:

> I did everything to become truly penitent, and finally fell into despair. When I came to him [i.e. Kuehn] to tell him my condition, he said: "Now it is time for you to believe." But I did not credit his advice; I thought that he was deceiving me because his last direction was out of keeping with the marks of penitence which he had described to me previously. Accordingly I said to him, "If you knew my condition, you would not comfort me. What I want is rules for my further conduct." He gave me them, too; but it was useless.[36]

The only respite Walther found was in the home of Mr. and Mrs. F. W. Barthel.[37] Speaking at the funeral of Mrs. Barthel Walther recalls the kindness Mr. and Mrs. Barthel showed him during the period of his spiritual trials.

> Fifty years have just elapsed since I had the great good fortune to be introduced by a godly friend to the family of the deceased. . . . Thus I found my spiritual parents, a father in Christ, a mother in Christ who now cared for me spiritually and bodily as for a son.
>
> I just at that time was in deep spiritual affliction, was famished in body and soul, and wrestled, doubting my salvation, with despair. No praying, no pleading, no weeping, no fasting, no wrestling seemed able to help; the peace of God had departed from my soul. . . .
>
> It was then especially that the dear departed carried me in her motherly heart. Then, as often as I crossed her threshold, her lips not only ran over with words of

---

[35] Ibid., p. 142.

[36] Ibid., p. 253.

[37] Walther, Lebenslauf, p. 19.

> evangelical consolation for me, but she wrestled day and night in fervent intercession with God for me, the strange youth. And behold! God heard her supplication; I at last came unto peace in Christ.[38]

But Walther's greatest source of spiritual help came from Martin Stephan. Pastor of St. John's, the Bohemian congregation of Pirna, just outside Dresden, Stephan was regarded as the most experienced curate of souls in Saxony and as a true witness to the doctrine of the Lutheran church.[39] All pastors to whom Walther went for spiritual solace finally recommended that he see Stephan,[40] the man who began all of his sermons with the words: "Through the blood of Christ, dearly bought souls."[41] Walther finally wrote to Stephan, resolved that he would throw his letter into the stove if in his reply he said anything about the grace of God and the Gospel.[42] However,

> When the writer finally received the answer, he did not open the letter before he had fervently asked God to preserve him against accepting false comfort, if the answer which he received should contain such. But after he had read it, it seemed as though he had suddenly been translated from hell to heaven. The tears of anguish

---

[38] C. F. W. Walther und P. G. Stoeckhardt, Reden gehalten am Sarge der weiland Frau Caroline Juliane Barthel (St. Louis: Druckerei des Lutherischen Concordia-Verlag, 1881), pp. 3-4. F. W. Barthel served for a time as treasurer of the Missouri Synod.

[39] Walther, Lebenslauf, p. 22.

[40] Ibid., p. 29.

[41] Martin Stephan, Der Christliche Glaube (Dresden: Koenigliche Hofbuchdruckerei, 1825), passim.

[42] Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 142.

> and distress, which he had so long shed, changed to tears of heavenly joy. He could not resist; he had to go to Jesus. Stephan showed him that he had long ago experienced repentance out of the law which he was seeking, that he now lacked nothing but faith, nothing except that he, like the man fallen among thieves, now yield himself to the heavenly, merciful Samaritan. So the peace of God came to dwell with him. Then he had a real experience of the meaning of private absolution for the deeply terrified sinner.[43]

Stephan's ability to comfort distressed sinners through the Gospel is reflected in his sermon for Good Friday, on the theme, "The Reconciling Death of Jesus Christ." His opening prayer signals the content and mood of his sermon:

> O Jesus, we bow our hearts in this hour before Thy cross, and pray to Thee with reverent fear who hast died for our sins on the cross. Thou hast fought an unspeakably great battle for us; Thou hast completed it and hast conquered all our foes; Thou hast tasted for us all the bitterness of death, and in that way hast taken from death its power and hast won eternal life; Thou didst suffer for us the righteous judgment of thy Father, so that we would not be judged; Thou wast forsaken by Him, so that we might enjoy His eternal grace. God, Substitute, have mercy on us! From Thy cross look down on us with love and be merciful to us poor sinners! Through Thy death Thou hast prepared eternal life for us all; ah, so give us all the true faith in this Thy reconciling death, in order that in this way all of us may become partakers of Thy grace. Let us experience that even today Thy death is efficacious for our reconciliation, is powerful for our salvation, as it was in the hour in which Thou didst cry: "It is finished!" Turn our hearts completely to Thee, that in heart and life we may be thankful to Thee for Thine unspeakable love which Thou through Thy death hast manifested to us! Protect us so that we do not crucify Thee anew through willful sins, but in fellowship with Thee walk before Thee in honor. Keep all, so that none regards the Word of Thy Cross as something trivial, but that all, reconciled thereby, may experience in their hearts the power of it! O Jesus, may Thy fear and pain be our comfort and

---

[43] Walther, Lebenslauf, p. 29.

> restorative in all suffering, in temptation and sadness! May Thy death be our comfort in our death! O Lamb of God slain for us, but now sitting upon the throne of Thy glory! Thou art worthy to receive might and power, praise, honor and prayer; and these all the heavens, all who through Thy completed death have been made righteous, bring Thee. Oh, do not despise our babbling, which we in our weakness bring to Thee! Give us all Thy peace for the sake of Thy death. Amen.[44]

The following excerpts from this sermon reflect Stephan's pastoral concern and indicate why Walther found assurance through Stephan's counseling:

> His was a substitutionary death for all sinners. He bore the righteous, but fearful judgment of God the Father. . . . He suffered and died in our place. . . . Even if in willful blindness they despise the death of Christ, even if they willfully want to be lost, let them; but have no part in their unbelief. Let us pray; let us in faith hold to the cross of Christ, and also in the hour of death pray: God, Substitute, have mercy upon us! . . . This marvelous death of Jesus Christ is of the utmost importance for us because it brings us the complete grace and forgiveness of all our sins; . . . . Think often, O Christian, I belong to Christ. Therefore I will live for Him. . . . If the death of Christ does not move one to a life of piety, nothing can move him, neither threatening nor punishment, neither promise of reward, nor shame before the world. The right source of holiness, love and thanksgiving is in the death of Christ. . . . Christ's sadness and fear in His death is our comfort and strength in all sadnesses of our life, if we have only turned to Him in faith, and have not deliberately pushed aside his salvation. Yes, you say, I do not do that; deliberately I do not remain away from Christ; but out of weakness it often happens, and this troubles my heart and makes me doubtful whether I can claim as my own the forgiveness of my sins which I have received through faith under the cross of Christ. If it is only your serious intent to remain with Christ and to follow after Him, that should assure you that the blood of Christ also today calls for you to heaven: "Mercy! Mercy!" You are surely fighting against your weaknesses; you are praying for strength; you believe in His reconciling

---

[44] Stephan, op. cit., pp. 458-459.

> death, and because of this faith you have only good to expect. Be comforted, Thy sins are forgiven! You will also experience the power of the blood of Christ in your sanctification. Christ knows our weakness. During the time of his earthly pilgrimage until the time of his death, indeed, until the time of his ascension, he was surrounded by weak men. In his suffering he learned to have compassion on us in our weakness. He carries us with patience and does not withdraw his gracious hand if we draw near to him in prayer. His cross is our throne of grace to which we always have access, from which we always receive mercy at the time when we need mercy.[45]

Ever after, Walther looked upon Martin Stephan as his spiritual father. He later wrote:

> Stephan really preached the Gospel, and that on the basis of his own experience. When he preached, he hardly moved a hand, nor did he change the inflection of his voice, but he simply preached the plan of God for the salvation of man. He preached the spiritual nature of the Law and its severity, the lost condition of man by nature, and the riches of the Gospel and the certain help every sinner could find in Christ. Whoever heard him once felt seized inwardly by his message. He aimed not so much at the feelings of a person as at the conscience. Whoever went to him seeking advice and comfort as a rule found advice and comfort drawn from the Word of God.[46]

---

[45] Ibid., 463ff. It is curious to note that this sermon reflects accents which are prominent also in Walther's preaching: The Christ for us; sanctification flows from justification; the Gospel alone can effect sanctification of life; and that one who longs for grace is already in a state of grace.

[46] Walther, Lebenslauf, p. 23. Franz Delitzsch paid this tribute to Stephan: "Martin Stephan is a beautiful, a significant name; the spirit of Martin Luther, the believing enthusiasm of the first blood-witnesses of the Church grace him who bears it." Franz Delitzsch, Wissenschaft, Kunst, Judenthum, p. 2, quoted in Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 51.

When Rudelbach was about to recommend Walther for a position as tutor for the children of a certain prince, he told Walther that he would recommend him provided he broke off his relationship with Stephan. To this Walther replied: "Shall I forsake a man who by the grace of God saved my soul from destruction?"[47]

Without a doubt Martin Stephan was a singularly great influence in Walther's life, but soon another Martin was to exert an influence on Walther as great as, if not greater than, that of Stephan. That man's name is Martin Luther.

This is how it happened: So intense was Walther's spiritual suffering that he had to withdraw from the university in the winter of 1831-1832, ill with tuberculosis. Franz Delitzsch describes his physical condition:

> During that period of struggle he was wasted like a skeleton, coughed blood, suffered from insomnia, and experienced the terrors of hell. He was more dead than alive, ...[48]

His illness proved a blessing in disguise, for during the days of his recovery Walther began an intensive study of Luther's works which he found in his father's study.[49] Guenther adds that here Walther became convinced that the Lutheran doctrine was Scripturally correct and that it was

---

[47]Walther, Lebenslauf, p. 29.

[48]Franz Delitzsch, letter to relatives of C. F. W. Walther, dated Pfingstmontag, 1887, in Lehre und Wehre, XXXIII (October, 1887), 289-290.

[49]Guenther, op. cit., p. 12.

necessary for one to maintain a firmness of conviction.[50] Walther himself declares that he learned the majesty of God from Luther's Bondage of the Will; what the Gospel is from Of the Keys; and what love to the neighbor is from Luther's writings against usury.[51] The fact of the matter is that from that time onward Walther was a faithful disciple of Luther. In a synodical convention he made his famous statement:

> A pupil, and I hope to God a faithful pupil, of Luther, I have, in all that I have publicly spoken and written in the past, simply repeated in a stammering way the words of this late prophet.[52]

The Forces in the Mature Walther

By this time Walther's formative period is complete. All of his future activity can be viewed as a working out and as a refinement of views which he now held to be true.

---

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., p. 180.

[52] Synodal-Bericht der Allgemeinen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten in Ft. Wayne, Ind., vom Jahre 1869 (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1869), p. 22. Cf. C. F. W. Walther, "Das fruchtbare Lesen der Schriften Luthers," Lehre und Wehre, XXXIII (November, 1887), 305-314. Fuerbringer, op. cit., pp. 83-84, describes Walther's work-habits in culling quotations from Luther and the dogmaticians: "In order to find pertinent passages of Luther readily, he had a cabinet with many pigeon holes, and he filled those with excerpts from Luther, Gerhard, and other writers according to a certain system of arrangement; and everything including the necessary references, he had copied with his own hand. Of course, there was no typewriter in those days, nor did he write shorthand." He adds that no one could match Walther in the knowledge of Luther. Pp. 83ff.

What were the theological points of view which were to guide him in his unparalleled leadership role in the history of The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod?

Certainly one guiding principle in Walther's perspective is the divine authority of the Word of God.[53] In his inaugural sermon at Braeunsdorf on Jeremiah 1:6-8, Walther said that one of the reasons why he could take courage and rejoice in his ministry was that he came not with his own wisdom but with God's Word.[54] Walther always exalted the Word, first of all, against reason. He felt compelled to leave Germany because the Landeskirche forced upon the congregations school books, hymns, and liturgical forms which contradicted the plain teaching of the Word of God.[55] Similarly, in his debates with the Iowa Synod over the matter of open questions, Walther was unwilling to regard anything as an open question on which the Word of God had clearly spoken. To do that would be to violate the authority of Scripture.

Moreover, Walther exalted the Word also over feeling. His own bitter experiences with the Pietists taught him that lesson. And particularly Thesis IX of his great classic on

---

[53] Infra, pp. 73-81.

[54] W. G. Polack, The Story of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), p. 25.

[55] On conditions in Saxony compare Walther, Lebenslauf, pp. 32-36; J. F. Koestering, Auswandergung der saechsischen Lutheraner im Jahre 1838 (St. Louis: Druck und Verlag von A. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1866), pp. 1ff.

Law and Gospel, reflects his position:

> The Word of God is not rightly divided when sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the Law are directed, not to the Word and the Sacraments, but to their own prayers and wrestlings with God in order that they may win their way into a state of grace; in other words, when they are told to keep on praying and struggling until they feel that God has received them into grace.[56]

Walther's appeal always is to the objectivity of the Word against the subjectivity of feeling. Hence, his insistence that Christ's righteousness is something that takes place outside of us and that justification is something that takes place in the heart of God.[57]

Furthermore, and Walther has Martin Stephan to thank for this, Walther looked upon the Scriptures as containing two words of God, the demanding and condemning word of the Law and the giving and consoling Word of the Gospel. This fact Walther knew already at Leipzig. Time, study, and the Holy Spirit provided the refinement of thought so eloquent in The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel.

A second major principle in Walther's theological outlook is that the task of theology is not to create something new but to return to the old paths of Luther and the Confessions and to remain grounded on these. It is worth noting that the masthead of the first and succeeding issues of Der Lutheraner carry the watchword: "Gottes Wort und

---

[56]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 127.

[57]Infra, pp. 97-107.

Luthers Lehr' vergehet nun und nimmermehr," "God's Word and Luther's doctrine shall never pass away." In a synodical address of the year 1866 Walther makes this position clear:

> What was the way in which the Lord granted us these blessings? It was none other way than this: that we establish nothing new, but that we asked for the old paths and walked in the good old ways (Jeremiah 6:16); that we sat down at the feet of Luther and the other orthodox, godly teachers, now triumphing in heaven, and walked in their footsteps; that we took the Church of the Reformation for our pattern and the pure confessions for our banner and guiding star and made them a wall round about us. . . . The old doctrine has now again shone in its old and eternally new power. By it thousands of souls have again been led to faith and through faith unto salvation; and a church has arisen one in faith and confession and shining in love and good works.[58]

Again, in a Reformation address Walther pleads for steadfastness to Luther's doctrine:

> Let us remain true to Luther's doctrine until death. That doctrine still has power today to which the faithful men of God held fast, a Luther, a Martin Chemnitz, a Johann Arndt, a John Gerhard. . . . This ancient doctrine of Luther is the good sword of the Spirit . . . the right way . . . the heavenly medicine . . . the voice of the Good Shepherd . . . the open arms of the Father . . . the soft death-bed of the wounds of Christ.[59]

However, it should be noted that he never gives Luther and the Confessions authority over the word. He writes to Pastor Ottesen:

> Of this I can assure you upon my conscience that I accept nothing from the old teachers, even not from Luther himself, merely upon their authority. . . .

---

[58]C. F. W. Walther, Lutherische Brosamen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1897), pp. 540-541.

[59]C. F. W. Walther, Goldkoerner (Zwickau: Druck und Verlag von Johannes Heermann, 1901), pp. 130-131.

> I do not accept it until they have from the Scriptures, either by a particular passage in proof of it or from the whole of the doctrinal content inwardly convinced and silenced me, which, as a rule, however happens in the case of the old teachers, because whenever they stand stubbornly by something, they are bound by some Word of God or by the whole of it.[60]

Walther's mature years reflect also the influence of Orthodoxy upon him. Apparently untouched by the influence of Schleiermacher, Walther was deeply impressed by the theologians of the seventeenth century and their theology. The catechism which he used in his parish was that of Johann Conrad Dietrich.[61] The text which he edited and used for his seminary classes in dogmatics was that of Johann Wilhelm Baier.[62] In this work he quotes extensively from the great seventeenth century dogmaticians: Chemnitz, Quenstedt, Gerhard, Calov, Hollaz, Hunnius, and others. Moreover, in

---

[60]Walther, Briefe, II, 33-34. It should be remembered, however, that this return to Luther is not characteristic just of Walther. E. G. W. Keyl said: "If we were allowed to pray to the saints, I would fall down on my knees before Luther." His file contained 8,000 references from Luther and 54,000 references to Bible passages used and explained by Luther. Mundinger, op. cit., p. 3. In a Maundy Thursday sermon Martin Stephan said: "These writings, known by the title Book of Concord every evangelical Lutheran should diligently read in order that he may know how to treasure the faith and confession of the church." Stephan, op. cit., p. 457. In his Die Stephan'sche Auswanderung nach America (Dresden: Verlagexpedition des Dresdner Wochenblattes, 1840), passim, Carl Vehse has copious quotations from Luther.

[61]Martin Luther, Kleiner Katechismus, gruendlich ausgelegt von Johann Conrad Dietrich (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1902).

[62]Joh. Guilielmi Baier, Compendium Theologiae Positivae, curavit Carol. Ferd. Guil. Walther. (In urbe Sancti Ludovici: ek officina Synodi Missouriensis Lutheranae, 1879.)

his doctrinal writings, his methodology is that of the teachers of Orthodoxy. He regularly divides his subject into theses. He then proceeds to validate individual theses with testimony from the Scriptures, the witness of the Lutheran Confessions, and the testimony of the Church as reflected in the writings of her teachers.[63] Again, Walther does not hesitate in his sermons to quote from the Lutheran Confessions, when he is attempting to establish a doctrinal point as being thoroughly Lutheran.[64] Furthermore, Walther thought thetically. This is reflected in his sermon themes, which generally are well-phrased propositions to which his sermons are directed.

Another influential force in Walther's development was Pietism. Not only Walther but all of the Saxons had a kindly feeling toward the Pietists. In his book Die Stephan'sche Auswanderung nach America, the attorney, Dr. Carl Vehse, quotes Spener, Seckendorf and Luther in support of his arguments, and only an exact tabulation would reveal whether he quotes Luther more than Spener. Furthermore, after the death of O. H. Walther, Trinity congregation decided that candidates Buenger and Schieferdecker were to read sermons

---

[63]Cf. C. F. W. Walther, Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt (Zwickau: Verlag des Schriftenvereins der sep. evang.-luth. Gemeinden in Sachsen, 1894), passim.

[64]Cf. Walther's sermon on predestination, based on Ephesians 1:3-6, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille (zweite Auflage; St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1882), pp. 271ff.

from Arndt's Catechismus Predigten in the early morning service.[65] Walther tells us that in addition to the Confessions, Buenger studied the pietistic literature assiduously. Later, however, he studied chiefly the writings of Luther and Brenz.[66] That Walther himself felt a kinship with the Pietists is evidenced by the fact that he includes Johann Arndt with Luther, Chemnitz, and Gerhard, and calls them all faithful men of God.[67] Again, when Walther was considering resigning from the Dresden congregation in Perry County, Missouri, he wrote his brother, Otto Hermann, asking him to find out what Spener had to say about removal from office.[68]

The question to which we now turn is a crucial one for this dissertation: To what extent was Walther influenced by Pietism? At the outset, it is well to remember that Pietism is not altogether a bad word. There were positive values in Pietism as well as negative features. It should be clear, too, that when I assert that Walther represents a synthesis of Orthodoxy and Pietism, I am not saying that Walther adopted in his theology everything that Pietism stood for. Quite the contrary, there were aspects of Pietism which

---

[65]Protokolbuch der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinde Ungeaenderter Augsburgischer Confession zu St. Louis, Mo., January 25, 1841, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri.

[66]Walther, Lebenslauf, p. 64.

[67]Walther, Goldkoerner, pp. 130-131.

[68]Guenther, op. cit., p. 40.

are reflected in his thought world and to which he gives expression in his sermons. In the following paragraphs I shall list the abuses of Pietism which Walther condemns, the positive values which he adopts, and the abuses which he does not entirely throw off. The remaining chapters of this paper will provide the necessary documentation for these assertions on the basis of his pronouncements in his sermons.

No one teaching of the Pietists does Walther more roundly, consistently, and persistently condemn than the teaching that a person cannot be sure of his salvation or trust the promise of the Gospel until he has by his own prayers and struggling with God worked his way into a feeling of being in a state of grace. That teaching literally almost killed Walther. And for that reason he became its most implacable foe. Fully seven of Walther's twenty-five theses in Gesetz und Evangelium are directed against this awful perversion.[69]

> Thesis VII: The Word of God is not properly divided when the Gospel is preached before the law; when sanctification is preached before justification; when faith is preached before repentance; when good works are preached before grace.[70]
>
> Thesis IX: The Word of God is not properly divided when sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the Law are directed, not to the Word and Sacraments,

---

[69]Robert C. Schultz, "The Distinction Between Law and Gospel," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (October, 1961), 594.

[70]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 89.

but to their prayers and wrestlings with God in order that they may win their way into a state of grace; in other words, when they are told to keep on praying and struggling until they feel that God has received them into grace.[71]

Thesis XII: The Word of God is not properly divided when contrition is placed on a level with faith as the cause of the forgiveness of sins.[72]

Thesis XIII: The Word of God is not properly divided when the preacher appeals for faith as though a person could make himself believe or at least cooperate in coming to faith instead of preaching faith into a person's heart by proclaiming the promises of the Gospel.[73]

Thesis XIV: The Word of God is not properly divided when faith is required as a condition of justification and salvation, as if a person were righteous in the sight of God and saved, not only through faith, but also on account of faith for the sake of his faith, and in view of his faith.[74]

Thesis XVII: The Word of God is not properly divided when faith is so described--in its strength, in its conscious presence and in its fruitfulness--that it does not apply to all believers at all times.[75]

Thesix XXV: The Word of God is not properly divided if the Gospel does not predominate in one's teaching.[76]

Walther opposes also the notion of the Pietists that it is dangerous to preach the forgiveness of sins because it quiets consciences and makes secure sinners. Walther admits

---

[71] Ibid., p. 127. Schultz says very correctly that this thesis is central in Walther's approach to Law and Gospel. Schultz, op. cit., p. 594.

[72] Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 249.

[73] Ibid., p. 260.

[74] Ibid., p. 268.

[75] Ibid., p. 308.

[76] Ibid., p. 403.

that the Gospel can make secure sinners. But he regards that as a calculated risk we take when we preach it. However, he vigorously opposes the notion that the Gospel is to be withheld from terrified sinners. He speaks out against that perversion in Thesis XI:

> The Word of God is not rightly divided when we offer the comfort of the Gospel only to those who are contrite out of love of God and not to those who are contrite out of fear of God's wrath and punishment.[77]

As to the unbelievers, Walther does not want the Gospel withheld from them either because without the Gospel the Holy Spirit cannot perform his proper work of bringing men to faith.[78]

Walther not only denounces evils in Pietism, but he sees in Pietism some accents which he considers good and which he follows. Here I write with some caution, because one can easily argue that the good of Pietism was also the good of Luther, and of Paul, and of Christ Himself. Granting the truth of this assertion, I feel that it was primarily through the impact of Pietism that Walther had certain truths impressed upon him. Chief among these is the accent that faith works by love. One of the virile teachings of Pietism is that an intellectual faith is a dead faith, and that only a faith which has fruits is genuine. Avoiding the confusion of justification and sanctification which at times occurred

---

[77] Ibid., p. 236.

[78] Infra, pp. 108-125.

in Pietism, Walther accents heavily in his preaching the truth that faith is a living, active thing.[79]

Another accent of Pietism, which Walther learned the hard way, was the privileges of the laity. Mundinger makes a good case for the fact that in the confusion in Perry County, Walther and the other preachers thought in terms of rule by the clergy, but that Dr. Carl Vehse opened Walther's eyes to the implications of the universal priesthood of believers.[80] Judging from his book Die Stephan'sche Auswanderung nach America it is clear that Vehse was influenced as much in his thought by Pietism as he was by Luther.[81]

Finally, there were certain tenets of Pietism of which Walther did not altogether rid himself. One of these is the notion that in every congregation there are also unbelievers. Walther is so persuaded of this that in his applications he quite consistently addresses himself first to the unbelievers, then to the Christians.[82]

Another excrescence of Pietism is an expression Walther frequently employs. After he has preached the Law severely, he frequently, though not always, closes with the appeal,

---

[79]Infra, pp. 137-149.

[80]Mundinger, op. cit., pp. 212ff.

[81]Vehse, op. cit., passim.

[82]Infra, pp. 192-194.

"Tut Busze und bittet um Grade," repent and pray for grace. Instead of following his own dictum to direct the terrified sinner to the Gospel, he follows the Pietist's refrain, "Repent and pray for grace."[83]

In the third place, there is a strain of legalism in Walther. When dressing in the latest fashions and allowing one's daughter to stand before a mirror to "doll herself up" become subjects for censure from the pulpit, I begin to see the shadow of Pietism hovering over the discourse.[84]

Who was Walther? A faithful follower of Luther, the Confessions, and the teachers of Orthodoxy, of course; a champion of the supreme authority of Scripture; a vigorous foe of some forms of Pietism, a friend of others, and a captive of others.

---

[83] Infra, pp. 187-189.

[84] Infra, pp. 180-181.

CHAPTER IV

WALTHER'S VIEW OF THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF THE SERMON

Before we can evaluate Walther's preaching properly, it is highly necessary that we examine Walther's view of the nature and function of the sermon. In this chapter, therefore, we shall learn what Walther has to say about the primacy of preaching, the qualifications of the preacher, the uses of Scripture in preaching, and the style of the sermon.

The Primacy of Preaching

Walther regards the public sermon as the most important task of every minister.[1] Every other function of the pastoral office is ancillary and must serve this chief function. Nothing, therefore, can compensate for failure in the pulpit.

> Even though a pastor is skilled in matters of liturgical form, or in church management, or in the private cure of souls, none of these can take the place of a good sermon.[2]

---

[1] C. F. W. Walther, Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoral-theologie (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten, 1872), p. 76. Hereafter this work is referred to as Pastorale.

[2] Ibid., p. 77.

A pastor who accomplishes little by preaching can accomplish little by anything else that he may do.[3] The worth of a pastor, therefore, lies exclusively in his ability to preach properly. "If he has not this ability, the pulpit is not for him, for the pulpit is for preaching."[4]

Walther has this high view of preaching because he regards the sermon as the means by which God achieves his goals of winning souls for the kingdom of God and preserving them in it.[5] In his view God is at work in the sermon accomplishing his saving purposes in the lives of men. Seeking to impress this point on the minds and hearts of theological students, Walther said:

> Bear in mind that the preacher is to arouse secure sinners from their sleep in sin; next, to lead those who have been aroused to faith; next, to give believers the assurance of their state of grace and salvation; next, to lead those who have become assured of this to sanctification of their lives; and, lastly, to confirm the sanctified and to keep them in their holy and blessed state unto the end. What a task![6]

Again, following the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Walther argues that "There is nothing that keeps people with the Church like the good sermon. . . . Audiences are held

---

[3]C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, translated from the German of 1897 by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), p. 247. Hereafter this work is referred to as Law and Gospel.

[4]Ibid., p. 248.

[5]Ibid., p. 23.

[6]Ibid., p. 248.

by useful and helpful sermons."[7]

Finally, Walther regards preaching as the "central element in every divine service."[8] That this is so is demonstrated by the utter simplicity of a German church service of a century ago. The Kirchen-Agende of 1856 lists the following order of service: The hymn: "Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit"; pastor: "Ehre sei Gott in der Hoehe"; congregation: the hymn: "Allein Gott in der Hoeh sei Ehr'"; pastor: "Der Herr sei mit euch"; congregation: "Und mit deinem Geiste"; the Antiphon; the Collect; the Epistle; the chief hymn; the Gospel; the hymn: "Wir glauben all' an einen Gott"; the sermon; the prayers; the hymn; the antiphon and collect; the benediction; the closing hymn verse.[9] In this order of service one can safely assume that in an hour-long service forty-to forty-five minutes were devoted to the sermon.

For these reasons, then, Walther contended that the sermon was of supreme importance, the chief task of every minister of the Gospel.

---

[7]"Apologie der Konfession," Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1959), XXIV, 50.51, quoted in Walther, Pastorale, p. 77.

[8]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 248.

[9]Kirchen-Agende fuer Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden (St. Louis: Druckerei der Deutschen Ev. Luth. Synode v. Missouri, O. u.a. St., 1856), pp. 29ff.

The Preacher's Qualifications

Walther has much to say about the preacher and about his requisite qualifications for the preaching office.

The first qualification of a minister of Christ is that he be a sincere Christian, dedicated to Christ and His service.

> When a person wants to become a servant of the Gospel, he must be so disposed toward his Lord Jesus Christ as to be able to say to Him: "My Lord Jesus, Thou art mine; therefore, I wish to be thine. All that I possess, my body and my soul, my strength and my gifts, all that I do, my entire life shall be consecrated to Thee, to Thee alone. Lay on me any burden thou pleasest; I shall gladly bear it. Lead me anywhere, through sorrow and joy, through favor of men or their disfavor, grant me a long life, or should I die an early death, -- I shall be satisfied with anything. Lead the way, and I shall follow.[10]

A faithful minister's heart must glow with love of the Savior and "he must be able to say with Paul and all the apostles, 'Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God.' 2 Corinthians 5:13."[11] So important is this matter of personal faith that it is a mere accident when someone is converted by a preacher who is himself unconverted.[12]

A second requisite, closely allied with the personal dedication of the preacher to Christ, is his personal faith in the truth which he preaches to others.

---

[10] Walther, Law and Gospel, pp. 77-78.

[11] Ibid., p. 307.

[12] Ibid., p. 23.

> when a preacher proclaims what he has so often experienced in his own heart, he easily finds the right words to speak convincingly to his hearers. . . . It is the heart that makes eloquent. . . . For when the hearers get the impression that the preacher is in full and dead earnest, they feel themselves drawn with an irresistible force to pay the closest attention to what the preacher is teaching in the sermon. That is the reason why many simple, less gifted, and less learned preachers accomplish more than the most highly gifted and profoundly learned men. . . . For if to the living faith of the preacher there are added great gifts and thorough learning, he will, in the end, be a mighty, efficient tool in the hands of God, ...[13]

Again, a pastor ought to be persuaded of the nobility of his office, even though it is the most despised and hated by the world. His is a glorious office for the following reasons: his work is concerned with the spiritual welfare of immortal souls of men; he employs in his work the Word of the living God; his aim is to lead men to the life of eternal bliss; his labors yield the precious fruit of the salvation of men; he has the glorious promise of the cooperation of the Lord so that his work is never entirely futile; and, finally, his labors have the promise of a gracious reward. For all of these reasons Walther asserts that if the holy angels were capable of envy, they would have reason to be envious of a preacher of the Gospel.[14]

Since not mere oratory, but the Word of God alone, can produce repentance, faith, and godliness in a person,[15] it

---

[13] Ibid., p. 112.

[14] Ibid., p. 225.

[15] Ibid., p. 111.

is furthermore, highly necessary that a preacher know doctrine. He must have both a complete, clear, and accurate knowledge of every doctrine of divine revelation and a good knowledge of the mutual relation of doctrines to one another.[16]

Another requisite of the minister is that he be faithful also in his sermonic work. Walther urges this especially for three reasons. The first is that sermonic work is difficult. Some imagine that preaching is easy because their standards of the sermon are too low. They imagine that if they have not preached heresy, that is sufficient.

> Such preachers are laboring under a great, an awful, a very pernicious error. A mere pious talk without logical order is not real preaching. Genuine preaching is inspired only by the Holy Ghost through His Word. Accordingly, a real sermon is produced only after all the spiritual and intellectual energy of a truly believing preacher has been exerted to the utmost, after fervent prayer, after all earthly cares have been chased from the mind, and after the preacher has been freed from all vain desires. This is a difficult task.[17]

A second reason for faithfulness is that the eternal destiny of men's souls is at stake whenever a pastor preaches. In every sermon he either helps or hinders a person's faith. And Walther can think of no greater sin than to keep someone from believing in Christ.

> To keep someone from believing in Christ is such an awful sin that words cannot express it. A person who restrains a soul from confidently laying hold on Christ--no matter whether he does it consciously or unconsciously,

---

[16] Ibid., p. 343

[17] Ibid., p. 247.

> purposely or from blindness, through malice or as a result of a perverted zeal for the salvation of souls--deprives that soul, as far as he is concerned of everlasting life. Instead of being a shepherd to that soul, he becomes a ravening wolf to it; instead of being its physician, he becomes its murderer; yea, instead of being an angel of God, he becomes a devil to that person.[18]

The third reason that ought to encourage every preacher to faithfulness is the fact of his accountability to God. The unfaithful preacher will one day have to stand before God with blood on his hands as God asks him, "Where are the sheep I entrusted to you?"[19]

Walther, therefore, laments the fact that too many preachers misuse their office to satisfy their greed for money, glory, and the love of ruling.[20] Nor does he have patience with those who squander their time on secondary matters and, as a result, resort to shaking things out of their sleeves so that they can complete their sermon work with the least amount of effort.[21] When a minister is so sleepy and devoid of all zeal for the kingdom of God and the salvation of souls,

> the inevitable effect is that the poor souls of the parishioners become infected by him, and finally the whole congregation is lulled into spiritual sleep.[22]

---

[18] Ibid., p. 361.

[19] Ibid., p. 571.

[20] Ibid., p. 401.

[21] Walther, Pastorale, p. 78. Cf. Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 398.

[22] Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 307.

Instead Walther recommends that the preacher begin work on his sermon preparation early. He says that if you wait until Wednesday or Thursday before examining the pericope for the coming Sunday "and after a superficial reading decide on some topic which will yield you eight pages of manuscript, sufficient for a talk of forty-five minutes, you act like an abominable hireling."[23] He continues by showing that the faithful pastor will begin a study of his text on Sunday evening, a week before he is to preach, and only most urgent business will keep him from this practice.[24]

Again, the preacher is to be a man of prayer. Every sermon is to be a product of prayer. When as one writes he feels cold, distracted, and dead, he is to lay his pen down and earnestly pray the Father to lift him out of his miserable state of mind and to let the breath of the Holy Spirit enter his heart.[25] If one does not beg the sermon from God at every step and does not step forward to preach with prayer, he cannot deliver a proper sermon.[26]

Finally, the preacher ought to cultivate a joyful spirit. And this attitude of joy in his heart ought to be reflected especially when he stands up to preach. He is not to stand

---

[23] Ibid., p. 322.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid., p. 298.

[26] Walther, Pastorale, p. 109.

in the pulpit sad-faced, as though he were inviting his hearers to attend a funeral; but his countenance ought to be like that of one going to woo his bride or to announce a wedding.[27]

The Uses of the Word of God in Preaching

Walther simply takes it for granted that the preacher will base his sermon upon the Word of God. For him the sacred Scriptures are the only rule and guide of faith, the true foundation of faith upon which one can confidently build. Moreover, the Word is also the power of God unto salvation, the God-given means through which God accomplishes his saving purposes in the lives of men.[28]

In order to achieve these objectives in preaching Walther suggests a five-fold use of Scripture. Taking his cue from 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Romans 15:4, and following Johann Jacob Rambach,[29] Walther distinguished the five uses of Scripture: _didascalicus_, doctrine, teaching; _elenchticus_, preaching against false doctrine; _epanorthoticus_, reproof of sins; _paedeuticus_, exhortation to a godly life; _paracleticus_, comfort.[30] Quoting Rambach, Walther says that some pastors

---

[27]Walther, _Law and Gospel_, p. 406.

[28]_Infra_, pp. 108-125.

[29]Johann Jacob Rambach, _Erlaueterung ueber die Praecepta Homiletica_ (zweite Ausgabe; Gieszen: bey Johann Philip Krieger, 1746), pp. 204-205.

[30]Walther, _Pastorale_, pp. 80-81.

think it a mortal sin if in every sermon they do not employ all five uses, De omnibus aliquid, et de toto nihil, "even if they have to drag in the usus elenchticus by the hair and rouse out of their graves the long-mouldering heretics."[31] Although some texts naturally suggest all five uses, no preacher should become one who plays a lyre of five strings. Instead the preacher must always test what the materials of the text, the situation of the hearers, and other circumstances will demand or permit. Prudence must decide which of the uses is to be employed.[32]

The Use of the Word for Doctrine

Of all the uses of Scripture, the first use, for doctrine, is the most important because it is the foundation of the other four.

> the first use of the Word of God is for doctrine; the first quality of a bishop as preacher is that he be apt to teach (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 2:24); the first office of the church is that of teaching, upon which the office of warning follows (Romans 12:7-8). The most important demand of a sermon, outside of demand that it contain God's Word purely, is that it be rich in doctrine.[33]

---

[31] Ibid.

[32] Using the text John 4, the Gospel for the twenty-first Sunday after Trinity, Rambach, op. cit., p. 230, lists themes according to the several uses: dedascalicus: "The Teaching about the Cross," or "The Teaching about Weak Faith"; elenchticus: "The Opposing of Those who want to see Signs and Wonders before they will Believe"; Paedeuticus: "An Encouragement to follow after Others in the Faith"; epanorthoticus: "A Shaming of Unbelief"; consolatorium: "The Rich Benefits of the Cross."

[33] Walther, Pastorale, p. 82.

A sermon which does not contain doctrine, however excellent otherwise, is a lean and empty sermon. As obvious as it would appear that a preacher should preach doctrine,

> It is almost beyond belief how many preachers sin in this respect. Hardly has the preacher touched his text and the doctrine to be taught when he starts exhorting or reproving or comforting..... Far from actually reaching the heart and kindling life, such sermons are more likely to preach people to death, to destroy any hunger they may have for the bread of life and systematically to produce disgust with and loathing for the Word of God.[34]

Analyzing the problem of the paucity of doctrinal preaching, Walther finds three causes: first, to shake things out of one's sleeve is far easier than thoroughly presenting a doctrine; secondly, many preachers have no thorough understanding of the revealed doctrines of Scripture and hence are unable to teach them to others; finally, some preachers have the foolish notion that doctrinal preaching is dry, that it leaves the hearers cold, and is not useful to produce an active living faith. "This is an utter mistake," says Walther.

> Actual growth in Christianity is not possible in a congregation without sermons that are rich in doctrine. The preacher who neglects this is not true to his calling, even though by zealous exhortation, earnest reproof, or consolation which he thinks to be particularly evangelical, he appears to be consuming himself in faithful care of the souls committed to his care.[35]

Not only is the preacher to preach doctrine, but he is also to be concerned that he preaches it in its truth and

---

[34] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

[35] Ibid.

purity. Following Luther, Walther declares:

> The first requisite of a sermon is that it proclaim God's Word in its truth and purity and nothing but God's Word. A preacher, if indeed he is a true preacher, should not pray the Lord's Prayer or ask for forgiveness after he has preached, but must say and exult with Jeremiah 17:16: "That which came out of my mouth was righteous before thee." Indeed with Paul all apostles and prophets say defiantly: "Haec dixit Dominus": God Himself said that. And again a pastor should be able to say: "I have been an apostle and prophet of Jesus Christ in this sermon." Here it is neither necessary nor good to ask for forgiveness as though you had taught falsely; because it is God's Word, not mine, which God neither can nor should forgive. Instead God substantiates and praises and crowns it and says: "You have taught correctly, because I have spoken through you and the Word is mine." Whoever can not thus boast of his sermon had better not preach because he certainly lies and blasphemes God.[36]

The preaching of pure doctrine is of such paramount importance because

> an entire audience can invite spiritual and eternal death by listening to a sermon that contains an admixture of the poison of false doctrine. A person can be deprived of his soul's salvation by a single false reproof or a single false comfort administered to him.[37]

Therefore a preacher ought to approach his task of writing a sermon with fear and trembling that he preach nothing contrary to the Word of God. He must also examine his written manuscript to be sure that it contains nothing contrary to

---

[36]Martin Luther, "Scrift wieder Hans Wurst," Saemmtliche Schriften, edited by John George Walch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1885), XVII, 1685, quoted in Walther, Pastorale, p. 78. The Walch edition of Luther's works is hereafter referred to as Wal. A.

[37]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 20.

the Word of God.[38] Again, Walther advises that if a minister makes a mistake while preaching, he should immediately correct himself, telling his hearers that he really did not mean to say what they have just heard.[39]

Walther takes issue with those who say that pure doctrine does not exist and who cry:

> Ah, do cease clamoring, "Pure doctrine! Pure doctrine!" That can only land you in dead orthodoxy. Pay more attention to pure life, and you will effect growth in genuine Christianity.[40]

He points out that that is like saying to the farmer, "Do not worry about good seed; worry about good fruits."[41] False doctrine is a noxious weed sown by the enemy to produce a progeny of wickedness.[42] And contempt for pure doctrine is contempt for the truth of the Word of God.[43] Therefore, Walther prays for his students: "May God even now implant in your hearts a great fear, yea, a real abhorrence, of false doctrine."[44]

---

[38] Ibid., p. 296.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid., pp. 20-21.

[41] Ibid., p. 21.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., p. 349.

[44] Ibid., p. 21.

Absolutely indispensable to the preaching of pure doctrine is the proper distinction between the two words of God, Law and Gospel. Quoting from Luther's sermon on the distinction of Law and Gospel Walther says:

> It is therefore highly necessary to distinguish properly between these two words. Where this is not done, neither Law nor Gospel can be understood, and the conscience is lost in blindness and error. The Law has its goal beyond which it cannot go, i.e., Christ. The Gospel likewise has its office and work, i.e., to proclaim forgiveness of sins to the troubled conscience. These two therefore cannot be confused without corruption of doctrine. . . . It is easy to say that the Law is a different word and doctrine from the Gospel; anyone can do that. But to keep them distinct and separate in actual practice requires much thought and labor.[45]

Where the distinction between Law and Gospel is not observed, sermons can be false throughout, even though they abound in Christian phraseology.[46]

In order to alert the student of homiletics to the ways in which Law and Gospel can be mixed, Walther notes that Law and Gospel are confused by

> whoever uses the Gospel to deprive the Law of its severity or the Law to deprive the Gospel of its sweetness;
> whoever so teaches that secure sinners are comforted and terrified sinners are still more frightened;
> whoever fails to direct those who are terrified by the Law to the means of grace and instead directs them simply to pray for grace;
> whoever explains the demands and threats of the Law to mean that, if a Christian does as much as he can, God

---

[45]Martin Luther, "Sermon vom Unterschied zwischen den Gesetz und Evangelio vom Jahre 1532," Saemmtliche Werke, edited by Johann Konrad Irmischer (Erlangen: Heyder und Zimmer, 1826-1857), XIX, 236ff., quoted in Walther, Pastorale, p. 79. This edition of Luther's works is hereafter referred to as E. A.

[46]Walther, Pastorale, p. 79.

> will be satisfied and will overlook the sins of weakness, and so preaches the Gospel as to make it seem to comfort only such as already in their life show a change of heart; whoever tries by the demands, threats, and punishments of the Law to persuade the unregenerate to good works and demands that those who are no Christians (still being without faith) shall desist from sin and love God and their neighbor;
> whoever demands a certain amount of contrition and comforts only such as have undergone a change for the better; whoever confounds not being able to believe with not being permitted to believe; and the like, such an one does not rightly divide the Word of Truth, but presents the Law and Gospel in a tangled and mixed form, even though he otherwise preach the Law and the Gospel and even define it correctly, yet he is guilty of preaching false doctrine.[47]

Furthermore, Walther says that that man is truant who preaches more Law than Gospel and who does not let the Gospel predominate in his sermons,

> and who does not let the golden thread of his preaching be the comforting doctrine of the reconciliation of the poor sinner by grace through faith in Christ Jesus without the deeds of the Law.[48]

Walther continues:

> Whoever chiefly moralizes or because he himself has never experienced the power of the Gospel is himself a servant under the Law, has no courage to preach the Gospel in its richness and abounding comfort; whoever is much more concerned that he will with the Gospel make souls secure and will lead them to hell, and therefore so limits the Gospel that poor sinners do not risk boldly to take ahold; whoever, as soon as he speaks about faith, always adds all manner of warning against self-deception and against believing too soon and is not concerned to preach faith into the hearts of his hearers--such a preacher may indeed believe that his way is the sure way of not distorting the Word of God and of not neglecting the welfare of souls committed to him, but actually he is guilty of distorting the Word

---

[47] Ibid.,

[48] Ibid., p. 93.

> of God and of sadly and inexcusably neglecting the welfare of souls dearly bought by the blood of Christ.[49]

Walther recommends that all pastors adopt the motto of Luther:

> In my heart (and sermons!) there rules and shall rule this article alone, namely, faith in my dear Lord Christ, which alone is the beginning, middle, and end of all my spiritual and godly thoughts day and night.[50]

In every sermon the preacher ought to treat so much of the way of salvation that if a person heard only that sermon, he could find the way to salvation. The three parts of the way of salvation, repentance, faith, and regeneration, should form the basis for every sermon. However, no one of these should be treated in isolation without reference to the other doctrines of the way of salvation.[51] Walther tells of the church member who told his pastor that he always preached on his pet theme, the way of salvation. To this the pastor replied:

> I always think that this sermon could be the last one which either I deliver or one of my members hears. Therefore I do not want to waste the last opportunity to call the sinner to repentance and point him to Jesus Christ, so that no one of my God-entrusted souls will be able to accuse me before the judgment seat of God and say: "I heard your sermon once and for the last time, with the unspoken question in my heart:

---

[49] Ibid., pp. 93-94.

[50] Luther, Wal. A., VIII, 1524, quoted in Walther, Pastorale, p. 94.

[51] Walther, Pastorale, p. 94.

What must I do to be saved? But you did not answer my question."[52]

In preaching doctrine, the pastor has the sacred responsibility also to declare the whole counsel of God for the salvation of his hearers.[53] Since the pastor is not lord over the Scriptures, but is a servant of the Word, he is inexcusably robbing his hearers of that which is due them when he is silent on any doctrine of Holy Scripture. "If an attentive hearer has listened to a preacher for years without receiving information about things relating to faith and life, the pastor is deserving of no small blame."[54] Neglecting to preach on all of the doctrines of Scripture the pastor could be faulted if on that account one of his hearers through ignorance went astray.[55] In order to obviate this situation, Walther recommends that the preacher have a plan which will enable him so to use the pericopes that in the course of a year every fundamental article of the Christian faith is treated.

But the preacher must remember that doctrines are to be preached in a proper relationship to one another. Some preachers, for example, preach much about faith but do not tell how a person comes to faith. By neglecting to preach

---

[52] Ibid., pp. 94-95.

[53] Ibid., pp. 90ff.

[54] Ibid., p. 90.

[55] Ibid.

repentance they tear a page from the Scriptures and lead people to become secure and fearless. Others preach repentance and faith but do not give thorough instruction regarding good works. The Antinomians belong to this class. They are good Easter preachers, but poor Pentecost preachers.

Again, in the preaching of doctrine, the congregation's spiritual maturity must determine the what and the how of the doctrine which is preached. A congregation weak in knowledge must be taught the basic elements of the Christian faith, the doctrines of faith and love. But mature congregations should be fed strong meat.

Walther joins Luther in scoring those frivolous spirits who want to show their art by preaching on difficult and allegorical passages, without paying attention to what is beneficial for the poor common man. "they are, praise God, all learned Doctors, whom we do not need."[56] Such preachers

> fly high in their sermons on Daniel, Hosea, the Apocalypse and similar heavy books; at the same time the crowd goes its way, listens and stands with its mouth open before such a blessed juggler with great wonder. When the end of the year comes, they do not know the Lord's Prayer, faith, or the Ten Commandments, which are indeed the basic elements in Christian nurture. . . .[57]

Therefore, Luther continues:

> The best and most beneficial teachers are those who know how to teach the Catechism, that is, who teach properly the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and faith. Those are rare birds. These do not attain

---

[56]Luther, E. A., XLII, 109ff., quoted in Walther, Pastorale, pp. 98-99.

[57]Ibid.

> great fame and outward splendor, but they are of great benefit and their preaching is the most necessary preaching because in it is included the whole Scripture, and there is no Gospel in which a person cannot teach these things if one only wants to do it and if the common man has the inclination to learn.[58]

The Use of the Word for Refuting False Doctrine

The most difficult task of the minister besides preaching the true doctrine is the exposing of false doctrine. The minister who faithfully does this will discover the truth of the saying: "Telling the truth makes enemies."[59]

However, the Church has no choice but to be at war. In its very nature, it is an ecclesia militans and will remain this until the end. A church, therefore, that is an ecclesia quiescens, a church at ease, is a false church.[60]

Moreover, the Scriptures themselves make it incumbent upon a preacher to refute false doctrine. Every minister of the Word is to "hold fast the faithful Word as he has been taught that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers."[61] The mouths of unruly, vain talkers, and deceivers must be stopped. For this we have the

---

[58] Ibid., pp. 99-100.

[59] Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 265.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Titus 1:9-11.

examples of the prophets, the apostles and our Lord himself.[62] Therefore,

> Whoever preaches the pure doctrine, but does not condemn and discredit the opposing false doctrine, who does not warn against and unmask the false prophets, is no faithful steward of the mysteries of God, no faithful shepherd of the sheep entrusted to him, no faithful watchman on the walls of Zion, but according to God's Word is a hireling, a dumb dog, a traitor.[63]

Luther adds that a teacher who remains silent before error is worse than a heretic. He is like a weathervane, who watches to see whether Christ or the devil will be victorious.[64]

Walther argues that it is just for this purpose that God has instituted a personal ministry of preaching that men may be warned against the peculiar errors, sins, and dangers of the age.[65]

> We preachers are answerable for the unattacked ruin of our time. We should witness and work against it. Who shall do it if we do not do it? . . . Woe to the preacher who does not disturb the wounds of our time but remains silent. Double woe to the man who commits spiritual adultery by joining forces with the men of progress of our day.[66]

However, Walther cautions against an indiscriminate use

---

[62]Walther, Pastorale, pp. 82-83.

[63]Ibid.

[64]Luther, Wal. A., XVII, 1477.

[65]Walther, Pastorale, pp. 105-106.

[66]Ibid., p. 107.

of polemics in the pulpit.[67] The needs of the congregation must determine to what extent and the manner in which this is to be carried on. Preaching polemically to a young, inexperienced congregation may lead the people to conclude that the pastor is an uncharitable person. In such a case, the people may either show a kindly feeling toward the false doctrine and false teachers condemned in the sermon, or they may become fanatical. Furthermore, a preacher is to remember that he is not to preach against all false doctrine, but against that which threatens his flock. At the same time, when error is refuted, it should be done in a thorough manner. Superficial polemics can do much harm.[68]

The Use of the Word for Correcting an Ungodly Life

The Word is to be used also for the purpose of correcting an ungodly life. To demonstrate the seriousness of this task, Luther in his Kirchenpostille says:

> The pastor or preacher who does not rebuke sin must go to the devil with sins not his own, even though because he has the forgiveness of his own sins, he is a child of salvation.[69]

In rebuking sin the chief rule is that the preacher should

---

[67]Carl Johann Otto Hanser, Irrfahrten und Heimfahrten (Buffalo: Lutheran Publishing Company, 1910), p. 212, reports that Walther warned him against the persistent use of polemics in the sermon and especially against mentioning errorists by name.

[68]Walther, Pastorale, pp. 100-101.

[69]Luther, Wal. A., XI, 40, quoted in Walther, Pastorale, p. 83.

rebuke prevailing sins in the congregation. If the pastor denounces sins not commonly found in the congregation, he will make more hypocrites than he will bring sinners to repentance.[70] Furthermore, if the congregation is deficient in knowledge, so that the members do not realize the seriousness of a certain sin, it would be wrong for a pastor to speak vehemently against that sin without first instructing the people.[71] Among other rules which Walther lays down are the following: The pastor should not give the congregation the impression that he is trying to lord it over them, that he considers himself a great saint among them. He should never use abusive, ironic, or sarcastic language, creating the impression that he is using the pulpit to wreak vengeance upon his hearers and to insult them at a time when they must remain silent.[72] Lukas Osiander reminds us that tactics like this embitter the hearts of the hearers and estrange them.[73] He adds that speaking modestly but seriously will more quickly win the hearts of the hearers.[74] Luther, too, denounces hot-headed preachers who do not know that it is one thing to plant and water and another

---

[70]Walther, Pastorale, p. 102.

[71]Ibid., pp. 102-103.

[72]Ibid., p. 103.

[73]Lukas Osiander, De Ratione Concionandi, p. 71, quoted in Walther, Pastorale, p. 84.

[74]Ibid.

to give the increase.

> As soon as they have said something, they expect it to be done. With well-chosen words they set themselves forward to stick and to bite now one, now another. But the nature of man is embittered by that kind of preaching. However, the man will be moved when he does not suspect the cunning of the preacher, but hears the Word preached freely and properly to the whole congregation. Then the Word moves and touches those whom the preacher does not know.[75]

On this same subject Walther says that a pastor should not rebuke openly on Sunday what has come to his attention by rumor or gossip during the week. Furthermore, he should be impartial in his denunciations. Again, a pastor should himself not be living in the sins which he condemns in others, for it is a disgrace when a teacher's own guilt condemns him. Finally, if a pastor finds that his congregation is at a low ebb spiritually, he should not make it a habit to "lay down the law." For, says Walther: "If this happens every day, then people get used to it. They will say, 'the preacher can do nothing except rail. That's the way he does it; one should not be too concerned about that.'"[76] Rambach reminds us that a student of theology who is not charged with the cure of souls in the congregation and any guest preacher ought not to employ a strong epanorthosis.[77]

---

[75]Luther, Wal. A., IV, 763-764, quoted in Walther, Pastorale, p. 85.

[76]Walther, Pastorale, p. 103.

[77]Rambach, quoted in Walther, Pastorale, p. 83.

The Use of the Word for Encouraging to a Godly Life

A fourth function of the sermon is to encourage Christians to a godly life. Doctrine and admonition must constantly be joined in the sermon because

> Christians are so constituted that even the grandest and richest doctrinal sermons in large part pass over them in vain when the sermons do not again and again combine admonition with doctrine, not only showing them the proper use of the doctrine but also encouraging them to use the doctrine.[78]

Walther adds:

> The meeting of the peculiar circumstances and peculiar needs of the congregation to which the Word is to be applied is therefore a chief part of the preparation of the pastor for his sermon. The comparison of the text with the need of the congregation, with the lacks and weaknesses which it suffers, with the dangers in which it lives, must determine not only the choice of theme but also the entire manner of handling the text.[79]

It is a grave mistake to say that it is sufficient that the doctrine has been taught and to argue that where the Spirit and faith are, there the fruits and good works will follow of themselves. To this Luther replies:

> However, although the Spirit is there, and as Christ says, is willing and works in those who believe, yet opposed is the weak and lazy flesh; in addition, the devil is not idle so that through temptations and allurements he may bring the weak faith to fall. Therefore, one must not let the people go their own way, as though one did not have to admonish and urge through God's Word to a good life. . . . We have not reached the point where our flesh and blood go leaping in pure joy and

---

[78] Walther, Pastorale, p. 86.

[79] Ibid., p. 96.

> eagerness to do good works and obey God, as the Spirit would have us do and faith shows us. . . . I verily believe that if we were to cease preaching and admonishing for a single year, we would become worse than the heathen.[80]

It is of the utmost importance to remember that this encouragement to a godly life is to be effected not through the Law but through the Gospel. Luther says categorically that whoever exacts works from the unwilling by means of the Law is no Christian preacher, but a worldly slave driver.[81] Moreover, whoever does not do works willingly, as a result of friendly admonition alone, is no Christian.[82]

The means, therefore, which must be employed in encouraging Christians to lead a godly life is the Gospel. "A preacher of grace invites and beseeches, by showing God's goodness and mercy."[83] If the fire of the love and grace of God does not melt a man, how can he be softened and made eager by laws and threats? Christian preachers should not be afraid to use the Gospel to produce sanctification because

> Genuine Christians, even though beset by weaknesses, do not want to ignore God's Word. They want to live for him who died for them; they do not want to serve the devil, sin, and the world. They want rather to be conformed to the likeness of their God. If, therefore, they hear in the preacher the voice of a gracious God,

---

[80]Luther, E. A., IX, 306ff., quoted in Walther, Pastorale, p. 87.

[81]Luther, E. A., VIII, 5-6, quoted in Walther, Pastorale, p. 88.

[82]Walther, Pastorale, p. 88.

[83]Ibid.

they cannot ignore it, nor do they want to.[84]

The Use of the Word for Comfort

The fifth use of doctrine, that of comfort, must be the goal of all preaching and the ruling content of the sermon of an evangelical preacher.[85] One should not imagine that the Christian is, as inexperienced preachers and enthusiasts picture him, one who is in a state of undisturbed heavenly rest. Rather, every true Christian has inner and outer tribulations. "He finds himself oftener in situations where he is without comfort than in serene certainty."[86] He needs comfort because of fears arising from sin and distress of conscience and from all troubles of this life. "A preacher should not think that every true Christian must be so spiritual, so heavenly minded, and so strong, that he is insensible to earthly need and over against this needs no comfort."[87]

A preacher should therefore seek to cultivate a fatherly, yes, a motherly heart toward the hearer. He should view the sorrows of the Christian not from his own point of view, but from that of the weak Christian entrusted to his care.

---

[84] Ibid., p. 86.

[85] Ibid., p. 103-104.

[86] Ibid., p. 88.

[87] Ibid.

> He must reflect that there is nothing more dangerous for Christians than worldly sadness and heaviness of heart, and that, therefore, Satan, the spirit of heaviness, always tries to hurl and sink Christians into sorrow; . . . .[88]

The faithful pastor must not only feel in his own heart the sorrows of others, but he must also use the sermon as an opportunity for comforting his hearers.

> A servant of Christ and shepherd of His sheep carries out his office very poorly when the Christian who comes to church with a troubled heart does not find there the comfort which he so sorely needs and for which he longs. Sermons which are empty of comfort for one who is a cross-bearer who is sorely tried are not true evangelical sermons.[89]

Nor should an evangelical preacher cease to preach comfort when he sees so many weaknesses in his members. Although he cannot dispense with the preaching of the Law, it is through the preaching of the comfort of the Gospel that these weaknesses can be healed. Here the faithful pastor ought to learn a lesson from Christ's dealings with his weak disciples. His ruling spirit with them was comfort.

The Style of the Sermon

Himself a superb stylist, Walther emphasizes also the necessity for following the rules of rhetoric. He insists that the style of the sermon be orderly, personal, simple, and exact.

Pleading for good order, Walther counts it the worst

---

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

fault in modern preaching that sermons lack point and purpose.[90] Those who have no plan in mind but are content with merely having preached the Word and take no aim are like "a ranger who imagines that he has discharged his office by sallying forth with his loaded gun and discharging it into the forest; . . . ."[91] Therefore, Walther advises that:

> The sermon should contain a chief thought upon which everything that the sermon contains is built and whose explanation and impression everything must serve.[92]

Just as every article of faith is already wonderfully organized in the Scriptures, so

> the preacher of God's Word ought not to split it up like dry wood, but ought to present it in its own wonderful order and its living relationship to the whole body of doctrine.[93]

As God is a God of order, he has so constructed man that things must be presented to him in an orderly fashion if he is to learn properly. Poor organization hinders comprehension of the truth, works inattention, and keeps the hearer from applying the sermon to himself. In short, a poorly organized sermon hinders the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the hearer. Addressing seminary students Walther admonishes:

May God help you in your future ministry from becoming

---

[90]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 99.

[91]Ibid.

[92]Walther, Pastorale, p. 108.

[93]Ibid.

> aimless prattlers, so that you will have to complain that you accomplish so little, when nobody but yourself is at fault because you have no definite aim when preparing your sermons. . . .[94]

Another requisite of the sermon is that it be personal. There are many sermons which are doctrinally and homiletically correct but which nevertheless do not touch the heart and conscience of the hearer. Such sermons do not follow the rules of Biblical psychology. Like arrows they either fly over the heads of the hearers, and if they do strike the hearer they do not hold him fast, but let him slip away like a fish out of a torn net. In other words, they do not bring the hearer to a definite resolve.[95] But good sermons must be personal so that every hearer feels, "He means me."[96]

Walther admits that one cannot learn the art of making sermons personal from a text book in homiletics.

> That must be learned through personal, living experience in Christianity and prayer. . . . Therefore Melanchton in his great humility said: "Preaching is not art; otherwise I could learn it too.". . . Who for himself has not experienced and does not daily experience the insidiousness and meandering and bottomless rottenness of the human heart, as well as the work of the Holy Spirit on himself . . . cannot deliver a proper sermon as it ought to be.[97]

Again, Walther insists on simplicity of style. The preacher must not only proclaim the truth, but must preach

---

[94]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 100.

[95]Walther, Pastorale, p. 109.

[96]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 53.

[97]Walther, Pastorale, p. 109.

so simply that a peasant "listening outside the sanctuary can understand it and feel himself drawn into the church."[98] When, however, a preacher uses high-flown language, "we behold the spectacle of a believing pastor and a congregation of spiritually dead people."[99] In this connection Walther recalls Luther's famous statement:

> When I preach, I bring myself down as low as possible. I do not see the doctors and magistrates, of whom there are about forty; but I consider the large crowd of young people, children, and servants who number in the hundreds and thousands. I preach to them; I turn my attention to them; they need it. If the others do not want to listen, the door is open.[100]

Together with simplicity Walther insists on exactness in style. Our words should be clear, plain, unmistakable and adequate.[101] Therefore, Walther advises:

> Accordingly, before you commit your sermons to memory and deliver them to your congregation, you must subject your manuscript to a severe critique, to ascertain not only whether your sermons are according to the analogy of faith, but also whether you have throughout chosen proper terms, lest against your own intention you destroy what you want to build up.[102]

---

[98]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 181.

[99]Ibid. Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer, 80 Eventful Years (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), p. 74, reports that in a sermon theme a student used the word basis. Reading the word Walther exclaimed: "Was?" (a favorite expression of his) "Was? Die Basis? What will the poor plain man think when he hears that word?"

[100]Luther, E. A., LIX, 272, quoted in Walther, Pastorale, p. 98.

[101]Walther, Law and Gospel, p. 275.

[102]Fuerbringer, op. cit., pp. 73-74, reports how Walther demolished his first sermon and how he insisted that sermons be "textual, logical, and, above all, truly evangelical, and couched in language which anyone can understand."

Summary

Reviewing what Walther has to say about the nature and function of the sermon, we observe first that he has a clear view of the sermon as the address of God to man in terms of His justice and mercy. But since God makes his encounter with the hearer through the instrumentality of the preacher, the latter's role is of supreme moment. His task is to be the best channel he can be for the saving activity of the Holy Spirit. But Walther cannot think of a sermon which is not oriented in the Word of God. The source of the sermon is the changeless Word for the changing world. The "Thus saith the Lord" must remain the dominant accent in preaching. But doctrine is not to be preached for its own sake. It is always for something. It is always for people beset by error, weakness, doubt, and fear. It is there to warn, to rebuke, to encourage in godliness, and to comfort. However, these high purposes can be frustrated if the style of the sermon is characterized by poor organization or difficult and inexact language. The preacher therefore must always be concerned to bear God's vessels of gold on trays of silver.

The succeeding chapters will illustrate how Walther in his own preaching carries out his own rules and how, at times, he falls short of meeting the excellence of his own standards.

CHAPTER V

THEOLOGICAL ACCENTS IN WALTHER'S PREACHING

Introduction

That a study of this kind should devote space to a consideration of Walther's theological accents is justified by Walther's own insistence upon the importance of doctrinal preaching. In his view a sermon lacking doctrinal content is a lean and empty sermon. Nor can one adequately admonish, encourage, and comfort without first establishing the doctrinal content upon which these rest.[1]

For Walther the task of the pulpit was to proclaim the whole counsel of God revealed in the Word. Therefore, while men like Dwight L. Moody and Charles G. Finney were accenting emotionalism, while Horace Bushnell was proclaiming the glory and grandeur of man as his own savior, while Henry Ward Beecher was extoling the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, while Washington Gladden was trying to construct a perfect man in a perfect society,[2] Walther was proclaiming the whole counsel of God as revealed in the Word.

As in Luther, so also in Walther, doctrines are not

---

[1]C. F. W. Walther, Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u.a. Staaten, 1872), pp. 81-82.

[2]Cf. Ernest Trice Thompson, Changing Emphases in American Preaching (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n.d.)

viewed as existing in isolation, but as organic parts of a whole. The focus of all of Walther's preaching is God's justification of the sinner by grace through faith. From the vantage point of this doctrine all other doctrines gain their significance. The cross of Christ reveals the justice and grace of God, the sinfulness and incapacity of man, and the self-giving, seeking love of Jesus. Only in the cross does the Spirit's work have meaning, only there does the Christian find the motive power for sanctification, and only there, the hope of heaven.

The Holy Scriptures

A basic affirmation in Walther's theology of the Word is that the Bible is God's Word. "It is no false light, but a light of God that shows me and lights up for me in the darkness of this world the way to heaven."[4] It is in truth God's

---

[3]In a letter, March 15, 1862, Walther encourages Stephanus Keyl to preach this basic doctrine always, reminding him of Article XXVI of the Augsburg Confession: "Doctrina de gratia et justificia fidei est praecipua pars Evangelii et quam maxime opportet exstare et eminere in ecclesia." Briefe von C. F. W. Walther, edited by L. Fuerbringer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1915), I, 175. Hereafter this work is referred to as Briefe.

Francis Pieper in "Dr. C. F. W. Walther as Theologian," translated from the German by John Theodore Mueller, Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVI (December, 1955), 914, declares: "After Luther and Chemnitz, no other teacher of our church has attested the doctrine of justification so impressively as did Walther."

[4]C. F. W. Walther, Licht des Lebens, edited by C. J. Otto Hanser (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905), p. 218.

own possession,[5] God's very own handwriting.[6]

> Since God is the all-knowing and all-wise, not only an entire book which he inspired a certain chosen man to write, but every sentence, yes, every word, is a rich, inexhaustible source of doctrine.[7]

Among the evidences for the divine character of the Scriptures Walther lists not only prophecy and fulfillment but especially the power which the Word is able to wield over the hearts of men.[8]

Although the Old Testament contains the same doctrine as the New, the Old Testament abounds in promises, prophecies, and stories of divine majesty and wisdom; the New, in realities.[9] One must therefore judge obscure passages in the Old Testament in the light of the New, for what lies concealed in the Old Testament is revealed in the New.[10] Although law predominates in the Old Testament, it is particularly valuable for demonstrating the faithfulness of God, who remained faithful to his people even when they proved unfaithful to him.[11]

---

[5]Ibid., p. 478.

[6]C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille (neunte Auflage; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1870), p. 221. Hereafter this work is referred to as Evangelien Postille.

[7]C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille (zweite Auflage; St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1882), p. 14. Hereafter this work is referred to as Epistel Postille.

[8]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 636-637.

[9]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 15.

[10]Ibid., p. 16.

[11]Ibid., p. 18.

Among the properties of the Word, Walther lists, first of all, its immutability. It does not change with the changing thoughts of the wisdom of this world, but is eternal and therefore unchangeable. Christians should therefore not wonder at it that a preacher of the Gospel today wants to confess the same truth which the Church has confessed for thousands of years.[12]

Walther asserts also the clarity of Scripture. "The Word of God is written so clearly and simply that the most unlearned lay person, if he will only take God's Word, can distinguish between the right and false shepherd."[13] Walther admits that there are dark passages in Scripture; however, these are to be interpreted in the light of crystal-clear passages.[14] When one word of God seems to contradict another, one must still not let anything be taken from either.[15]

The Word is not only a word to be believed but a power at work.

> The word of the preaching of Christ contains not only what a person should believe but has, at the same time, a supernatural, godly power to work a living faith in Christ in those who hear it. The Word of God about Christ is no dead letter but is as Christ says, "the spirit of life."[16]

---

[12]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 37.

[13]C. F. W. Walther, Goldkoerner (Zwickau: Druck und Verlag von Johannes Heermann, 1901), p. 62.

[14]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 175.

[15]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 331.

[16]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 620.

God's Word is so powerful that even a fragment of its fundamental doctrines can work man's salvation.[17] In support of his argument Walther quotes Luther's well-known statement:

> I have dealt with, preached and taught only God's Word; in addition to that I did nothing. That same Word accomplished so much while I slept or occupied myself with good things, that popery has become so weak and powerless so that up to now no prince or Kaiser has been able to demolish so much. I did not do it; the Word alone, preached and written about by me, accomplished and handled all of it.[18]

In the revelation of the Word, Christ is central.

> The Word of God is the golden ring in which Christ alone, the costly diamond, is set. The Word of God alone is the heaven in which Christ, the eternal sun, shines. Out of the Word of God alone, therefore, a person can experience who Christ is, how high and noble his person, what the purpose of his coming into the world was, and what His work among men was.[19]

Furthermore, God's Word is a sure foundation of faith upon which we can confidently build. "What Christians find in the Word, they should consider more certain than if they had seen and heard it themselves."[20] Since reason can err, we certainly can not rely on it. But what God says in his Word is sure.[21] If we could not firmly rely on the Word without fearing that we would fall into error, our faith would be vain. It would be like a house built on sand.[22] But

---

[17]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 75.

[18]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 685.

[19]Ibid., p. 124.

[20]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 48.

[21]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 608.

[22]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 147.

> Nothing is so certain as the written revelation. There he has something by which he can take God at his Word. . . . From day to day he has it as a fountain from which continuously he can draw truth and clarity . . . there he has a mercy-seat from which he as the high-priest of the Old Testament can time and again receive God's answer. . . . God will not, God cannot disown it. God will, God must acknowledge it as surely as God is God.[23]

The Word is indeed the foundation on which the Church stands or falls.[24] This makes utterly ridiculous the thought of some that we should "no longer speak of a truth already found, but consider the truth a hidden treasure which we should seek together with them.[25] Of the Scripture Walther says:

> if a person could not trust every word of it, if a person had first to seek for himself the good and true in it, would it be possible for a person to build on any word of Scripture with certainty? No, then every statement of the Bible would be unsure and man . . . would really believe only on himself.[26]

The Word is not only the foundation of faith, but also the judge and rule, a plumbline in all questions and disputes of faith.[27] It is the certain touchstone of all truth and error.[28] It is the weapon with which to do battle against false teachers.[29]

---

[23] Ibid., pp. 220-221.

[24] Walther, Goldkoerner, p. 110.

[25] Ibid., p. 105.

[26] Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 217-218.

[27] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 122.

[28] Walther, Goldkoerner, p. 179.

[29] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 257.

Therefore the Word of God must be supreme in the Church. It must be the only guide and rule of our faith and life.[30]

> Some may be of the opinion that the preacher must do what the congregation commands him and preach what they like to hear. Far be it. As little as the congregation is subjected to the pastor, so little the pastor to the congregation. In the Church of Christ no man should rule. But every one should bow under the scepter of the Gospel of Christ.[31]

Therefore,

> Woe to a congregation when their pastor wants to be faithful in teaching God's Word and the congregation demands that he preach publicly or privately something else than God's pure Word.[32]

At the same time, pastors should remember that the Word is God's, that they are not arrogant masters, but humble servants[33] of it and that as stewards they have the responsibility to preserve it in its truth and purity.

> God's Word is in truth God's own possession which he has entrusted to his servants to use and of which they can not yield a letter. Whoever yields something of the Word of God makes himself indeed beloved to the world but before God he is an unfaithful steward, a thief and a betrayer. That God's Word remains pure, that is more important than freedom and unity among all men because God's pure Word alone brings peace with God and leads to eternal peace. It is for that reason that as far as God's Word is concerned preachers are not commanded to establish peace with those who falsify the Word of God, but to avoid them and to fight until death. . . . you see, my beloved, false doctrine is not as harmless as most men think. . . . According to the judgment of Christ every false teaching is poison that

---

[30] Ibid., p. 204.

[31] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 32. Cf. Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 260.

[32] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 23.

[33] Ibid., p. 21

> can kill the soul. . . . According to Christ false teaching works false faith. . . . According to Christ every false teaching is a false way preparer for eternity.[34]

This spirit of Walther explains his attitude toward the demand of the Iowa Synod that "we should declare those doctrines free and open questions which are clearly revealed in God's Word or which plainly contradict God's Word."[35] "Our church," he continues, "wants to be nothing else except a handmaid of the Word."[36] In a confirmation address he pleads for faithfulness to every doctrine of Scripture:

> Do not think that it does not matter when you in one or the other point depart from the clear Word of God. Rather believe that if you leave or deny the truth of God in one point, you leave and deny it all.[37]

In short, we must look to the Word and not to the crowd. Noah stood alone with his faith against the whole world.[38] "If you have for a doctrine a clear word of God, remain with this word relentlessly, stand on it as on a rock and flee to it as your strong fortress."[39] We must build on the Word and not on our own reason. We are not "to build bridges of human reasoning over the bottomless abysses of divine decrees."[40]

---

[34]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 478. 480. 481; cf. Ibid., p. 686.

[35]Walther, Goldkoerner, p. 105.

[36]Ibid., p. 110.

[37]Ibid., p. 46.

[38]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 453.

[39]Ibid., p. 214.

[40]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 91.

If we cannot comprehend something clearly taught in Scripture, we ought not to reject it. "It is more fitting for us poor, short-sighted creatures to believe the all-wise God blindly and lay our hand upon our mouth."[41] A church in which human fancy and cleverness is preached is nothing else than an open door to hell.[42] We are to rely on the Word and not on our own feeling because feelings can deceive, but the Word never does.[43] For those who reject the Word are like sailors without a sail, compass, or rudder.[44]

On the other hand,

> Where the pure Word is, there only is the truth; where the truth is, there is Christ and the Church; where Christ is, there is God; where God is, there is salvation.[45]

Summary

From these paragraphs it is evident that Walther regards the Scriptures as normative for theology. Like the fathers of Orthodoxy, Walther proclaims the Scriptures as the principium cognoscendi in theology and with the Lutheran

---

[41] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 176.

[42] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 96.

[43] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 453.

[44] Ibid., p. 219.

[45] Walther, Goldkoerner, p. 179.

Confessions he calls it the only rule of faith and life.[46] Though Rationalism may exalt reason over the Word and Pietism feeling over the Word, the Scriptures stand supreme over both. They are the touchstone of truth, the final arbiter in all theological questions.

Moreover, in the Scriptures God has revealed Himself in Christ to man for man's salvation. Who this God is who confronts man with himself in the Word is the subject to which we now turn.

The Doctrine of God

In Walther's view God is, first of all, a God of history. "The whole history of the world is a history of God, namely, a history of his love to man, a history of God's ruling the world for its salvation."[47]

If we look at events in the world only with reason, it may indeed appear as though God is only an idle spectator. But in the light of the Word and of faith we see that God has foreseen all that occurs in history.

> Not only does God have the good but also the evil in his hand. Either he hinders it or sets its bounds, or he lets it happen and thereby carries out his judgments of grace and wrath.[48]

---

[46]"Von dem summarischen Begriff, Konkordienformel, Solida Declaratio," Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1959), p. 838, 3.

[47]Walther, Goldkoerner, p. 7.

[48]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 102.

The light of the last day will reveal "that nothing happened without God's will, that everything, good and evil, had to serve Him."[49]

Of particular significance in a study of Walther's theology is his accent on the justice and grace of God. These are two opposite attributes which belong to the essence of God.[50] According to His justice, God is inviolably holy, righteous and true; according to His grace, He is full of love and mercy.

Speaking of his justice, Walther says:

> God is not at all as most suppose, a loving, indulgent father. He is truly a holy and upright being. He really hates sin and His wrath waxes hot on its account down to the lowest hell. Of a truth, sin is no joke to God, no trifle which he is willing to overlook. Had Christ not been willing to take on himself the sins of all men, to atone for and let himself be punished for each sin through unspeakable suffering and a most painful death, God could not have saved a single person, nor would he have wanted to. Each sin is so offensive to God's holiness, that he would and could rather let the whole sinful world be lost rather than to let one sin be unpunished. What the Holy Scriptures say about God's wrath and fury are no mere empty figures of speech, but the frightful, terrible truth. Man has the sweet dream that God is a gracious being of whom none need be afraid. Their God is a phantom, a miserable product of their own mind. For how God really is we see in the bloody tragedy of Golgotha where the only begotten Son had to atone for the sins of men if sinners should find grace at all.[51]

When man sins, God must punish sin, otherwise He ceases being a holy and righteous God. Had God forthwith pardoned fallen

---

[49] Ibid.

[50] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 35.

[51] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 106.

man, He would have demonstrated that He is not true to His threats.

> He would have been like a weak, old father who utters all manner of threats and commands to his children but carries neither out. No, my friend, as certainly as God is holy, righteous and true, so certainly could he not retract his law nor fail to carry out his threats.[52]

Walther says further, "Divine wrath is His divine essence, in short, God himself. . . . As long as God keeps his divine essence, he must become angry at sin, angry to all eternity."[53]

That God becomes angry with sin is not only written in every man's heart, but is also testified to by human experience. Among these evidences are the universal reign of death, the fact that the world is a vale of tears, the flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and of Jerusalem. The wrathless God of the unbelieving world is "but a fiction of the human heart . . . a useless idol whose prototype is sinful man himself."[54]

A ruling principle in the discussion of the justice of God is that God's love is not greater than His justice. This principle is graphically portrayed in Christ's tears over Jerusalem. His tears over the city are tears of love; yet He must give it over to its doom. His love cannot and does not prevent His justice from carrying out its demands. "Indeed, over the eternal death of the sinner divine love

---

[52]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 35.

[53]Ibid., p. 140.

[54]Ibid., p. 139. Cf. Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 274.

weeps tears of pity, while God's justice gives him over to eternal death."[55]

Nevertheless, God remains righteous even when a person is lost because he provided in Christ a way of escape; he also invites all, but men reject the hand of reconciliation.[56] Walther compares God with a rich man who invites all to receive a large sum of money. When only a few accept, the man is not unjust if some get rich and others remain poor.

> See, so God is not unjust because a believer who takes the salvation is saved, and when the unbeliever who refuses salvation, is lost. God is not unjust over against the unbeliever, but the unbeliever is unjust toward himself. It is not God who damns the unbeliever, but the unbeliever damns himself.[57]

Even on judgment day all damned persons will have to say to God: "You have not damned us, but we have damned ourselves."[58]

But just this consummate holiness and righteousness of God was the reason that his equally unending love and pity could be revealed in Christ.[59]

> If Christ had not died for sinners, God's love, as great as it is, could not have saved a single sinner. But after Christ has done and suffered all for man which God's justice demanded of him, God's love can save all who take Christ as their Savior and substitute in faith. Because if God's justice wants to damn a believing sinner, Christ speaks for him and says: "I have

---

[55]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 504. For a fuller discussion see the entire sermon.

[56]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 325.

[57]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 137.

[58]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 325.

[59]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 608.

paid for him."[60]

However, no change took place in God even after Christ died. As little as the Law was annulled through the death of Christ, so little was the wrath of God.

> through the reconciliation God has become a friend of the sinner, but not a friend of sin; through it he became reconciled to sinners, but not to sin. Only the devil is a friend of sin; only the devil is reconciled with sin. Whoever, therefore, believes that after Christ's reconciliation God is no longer angry at sin but has become a friend of sin and one reconciled with sin, he turns the reconciled God into an evil God, yes, and it is awful to say, into a devil; actually it is this God and no other which the world worships as its so-called "dear God" without recognizing it.[61]

Christians especially should remember this truth lest they fail to be zealous in their sanctification. Some may be tempted to think that since the Gospel is preached, God's Law is no longer valid, and that God is a gracious, loving, and indulgent Father. Quite the contrary,

> His wrath still burns against every intentional willful sin to the lowest hell. Even for the sins of weakness of believers God's Son must stand before God as their intercessor until judgment day, in order to stop God's wrath so that he does not turn himself loose upon the sinners and destroy them. Woe, woe, therefore, to those who after they have come to faith in Christ think that they have received a charter for not having to pursue sanctification earnestly! . . . God is not their friend but their avowed enemy.[62]

Although God is and remains righteous, he is also love, a moving, eternal, overflowing ocean of love with which he

---

[60] Ibid., p. 502.

[61] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 141.

[62] Ibid., pp. 124-125.

surrounds his creatures.[63]

The more accurate word to describe God in his love is the word grace. In his Christmas Day sermon on Titus 2:11-14 Walther points out that love would have been good enough for man in his innocence, but man, the sinner, needs grace.

> nothing in heaven and on earth but grace, free, undeserved grace, could deliver us; and grace can save us because it deals with sinners, and with no one else but sinners; . . . .[64]

God's grace is eternal. Already in eternity, as he saw in advance man's deep fall into sin, God determined in his unspeakable father-love to deliver humanity from the consequences of its sin.[65]

God's grace is also free. It can in no sense be earned by anything that man may do to make himself worthy. It is given without, yes, even against, all the worthiness and deserving of man.[66] God alone wants the honor for the rescue of our souls and for our salvation. He wants to give it to us free of charge.[67]

The absolute gratuity of grace is demonstrated most effectively in the doctrine of election.

God did not foresee something good in his elect which

---

[63]Ibid., p. 35.

[64]Ibid., pp. 31-32.

[65]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 609.

[66]Ibid., p. 591.

[67]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 317.

> he regarded and which then moved him to choose them; rather he saw them lying in their sins and said, "You shall live." God did not even consider their faith and because of their faith choose them; but because no person can give himself faith, he decided from eternity to work faith in them through the Gospel and preserve them in it unto the end.[68]

The free gracious election of God therefore not only precedes the salvation of the elect but is also the cause of their salvation.[69]

Grace must be free because of the absolute impotence of man in spiritual matters.

> No, you did not elect God, but God elected you. You did not seek him, but he sought you. . . . You could not help along in the least in your conversion. It was no work of your free will because you had no free will. You were dead in sins. Your conversion was altogether God's work. You could not prepare yourself to receive God's grace because before His grace came upon you, you could do nothing but sin. You could not take the offered grace yourself. God first had to give you the hand of faith. God had to create the beginning of the perseverance. He alone can also finish this blessed work. So where is your glory? There isn't any.[70]

Even the greatest Christian must confess that he is saved by grace alone. Whoever supposes that he became a Christian in another way is just no Christian.[71]

God's grace is also universal. Christ died for all, the Gospel is to be preached to all, and God wants to give

---

[68]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 276.

[69]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 94.

[70]Ibid., pp. 94-95.

[71]Ibid., p. 236.

faith and preserve in faith all who have come to faith by his grace.[72]

> There is no person, not even one in the whole wide world, from Adam, the first person created, to the last one to be born, who is excluded from God's saving grace. The heathen is not excluded because he is a heathen; the Jew is not because he is a Jew; the poor man is not because he is poor; . . . the respectable sinner not because he is respectable; nor you, poor sinner, because you have sinned too greatly; yea, nor you who have fallen because you have fallen and have already received so much grace in vain. No, no, no one is excluded, only he who excludes himself. When God's grace appeared here on earth, the whole world became a dwelling place of grace for all dwellers of the world; and since God's grace suffered in this world for thirty-three years, the whole span of your life on this world is a period of grace.[73]

In a particularly moving passage Walther describes the grace of God abounding even to the chief of sinners:

> The greater the sinner's sin becomes, the greater is Christ's grace; the deeper the sinner falls, the higher Christ's love climbs; the farther the sinner is separated from Christ, the more loudly he calls after him and the farther he runs after him in order to meet him on his road of sin and hell and to lead him to his arms.[74]

The Christian bases his assurance of personal grace on the universal grace of God. Because God loves all men, the Christian knows that he loves also him. Because the Triune God wants to save all men, he wants to save also him.[75]

---

[72]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 278.

[73]Ibid., p. 33.

[74]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 420.

[75]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 92.

This is the Christian's confidence in the grace of God:

> Now I do not doubt because even though my sins may be great, Christ's grace is greater. Although I am very poor, his grace makes me rich. Although I am and remain a sinner, his grace makes me righteous. Although I am despised, his grace makes me worthy. Yes, although I am damned and lost in myself, his grace rescues and saves me. Christ calls grace to me from the cross. Grace streams to me from his wounds. All the prophets and apostles preach grace to me. Grace is written in bright letters in my heart. Grace is my word of deliverance. Grace my hope, grace my strength and energy in battle. Grace my victory. Therefore I know that grace will lead me through death and hell and judgment and open heaven to me.[76]

Summary

It was most illuminating to see how consistently Walther accents the three attributes of God: his immutability, his justice, and his grace. It is within the framework of these attributes that Walther's theology moves. God is just and immutably so; God is also gracious and immutably so. If he ceased being either just or gracious, he would cease to be God.

Walther points to the cross as the meeting place of the justice and grace of God. How emphatically he shows that in the death of Christ God did not annul his justice. I feel that one of the distortions some preachers make is to picture God before Good Friday as all justice and after Christ's death as all mercy, Christ being the one who changed God's mind. Walther avoids this sad distortion of the essence of God, holding that both justice and mercy are immutably of the essence of God.

---

[76]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 222.

However, Walther does not describe these attributes abstractly, but in connection with God's gracious purpose to rescue man from himself. The following section points to man's great need of rescue.

The Doctrine of Man

The doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith alone can be understood properly only against the background of the doctrine of man.

Man, created in the image of God, was a walking temple of the Holy Trinity. God dwelt in him. Just as the image in the mirror moves as the person before it moves, so all "thoughts, desires, words and works of the newly created man were altogether workings of God who loved, blessed, and ruled him."[77] As a fish in water, as a bird in the air, so the first man lived in God and in his love as in his element.[78] Man longed for God with all his being as for his highest good.[79]

However, when man fell into sin, a tragic change took place in him and in his relationship with God. He lost the love to God and to his neighbor and took on a new love, the love of the world, the creature, vanity and sin.[80] He

---

[77]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 365-366. Cf. Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 46.

[78]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 605.

[79]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 246.

[80]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 145.

lost God's image, the divine nature, the divine mind, the Spirit of God, the concreated righteousness. Instead he became a child of sin, a child of darkness, a child of wrath, death, hell and damnation.[81] Natural man, therefore, is no longer in his element. He no longer lives in God, but is turned from God.[82]

In the familiar terms of the catechism, Walther describes natural man as being blind, dead, and an enemy of God.

Describing the blindness of natural man, Walther points out that he pays attention neither to sin nor to grace.[83] He takes an indulgent view toward his own sin. He doesn't realize that the smallest sin is damnable.[84] The fall has erased most of man's knowledge of the Law. It has made it illegible.[85] Man adopts the attitude that God is a loving Father full of patience who will certainly forgive his sin. He comforts himself by saying: "Indeed, we are all sinners."[86] Although he admits that he probably deserves punishment, surely, he thinks, he has not deserved

---

[81] Ibid., p. 46.

[82] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 559.

[83] Ibid., p. 323.

[84] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 11.

[85] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 274.

[86] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 596.

eternal damnation.[87] At times man sinks so low as to deny the fact of future retribution against the testimony both of the Word and of conscience.[88] He simply does not realize his terrible condition. The deadly poison of body and soul he regards as good fortune and salvation.[89] In his blindness he wishes to be his own lord.[90]

> The first man fell by wanting to be like God. All pride, all haughtiness, all arrogance, all self-reliance, all boasting on man's part is but the terrible sin of man making himself God, deifying himself.[91]

Man's blindness is fundamentally this that he does not want to be a sinner.[92] "He supposes that he must first better himself and cleanse himself, that he must bring something along in order to move Christ to receive him."[93]

Hence, he is blind also to the grace of God. The Word of the cross is foolishness and an offense to him.[94] The Bible is a closed book to him.[95] Christ remains a riddle

---

[87] Ibid., p. 125.

[88] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 333.

[89] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 605.

[90] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 265.

[91] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 238.

[92] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 352.

[93] Ibid., p. 227.

[94] Ibid., p. 352.

[95] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 652.

to natural man, foolishness and an offense.[96] Natural man hears the Word outwardly but not inwardly because he thinks he does not need a Savior.[97] In fact, the preaching of the cross stirs up the world against Christ.[98] This willful unbelief is the ultimate cause of a man's damnation. It is not his unworthiness, or his many sins, but his rejection of the offered gift of grace that damns him.[99] "God has to decide to let many men be lost not with joy in their death, but if I may say so, with pain and sadness because the obstinate impenitence of these men compelled him to it."[101] Natural man is, therefore, like a sleeping person who is not conscious of the rising sun shining in his bedroom. He is like a desperately ill person who sleeps with his eyes open. He lets the light of the Gospel shine upon him but his understanding and heart remain unenlightened. He has only a historical faith.[102]

> When God blesses them with worldly goods, in order to bring them to repentance, they consider their good fortune a sign that they are in grace and become the more secure; on the other hand, when God sends them trials and tribulation, in order to tear them away

---

[96] Ibid., pp. 126-127. Cf. Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 145.

[97] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 621.

[98] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 33. Cf. Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 602.

[99] Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 338-339.

[100] Ibid., p. 615.

[101] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 92.

[102] Walther, Epistel, Postille, pp. 1-2. Cf. Ibid., p. 9.

> from the world and to draw them to himself, they begin to murmur against God and increase their enmity against Him, as though he were unrighteous.[103]

Against this background, one can understand why Walther insists that first the Law and not the Gospel is to be preached to natural man. The preaching of Christ as Savior and doctor will not benefit one who does not feel the sickness and misery of his soul. He needs, first of all, the preaching of the Law in order that he may come to himself.

> Man is by nature full; he must first become hungry and thirsty for grace. Man by nature thinks he is rich in his soul; he must first be made poor in his heart. Man by nature is sure, hard, proud, and fears death, God's wrath, and hell hardly a moment; first he must become comfortless, fearful, and smitten in heart. Man by nature loves sin and the world; first these must become bitter as gall to him. . . . First man must come under the old bondage of the Law before he can enter the new covenant of grace. First man must stand under smoking and quaking Sinai with trembling before he can stand before the manger of the Christ with child-like joy and can embrace and kiss him.[104]

Natural man is not only blind, but he is also spiritually dead. In spiritual things, in everything which concerns his salvation, man is not only weak, but entirely without power. There is no genuine good in him, not even a spark. He has no free will to choose to believe or to prepare himself for grace.[105]

---

[103] Ibid., p. 2.

[104] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 46.

[105] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 113.

> a spiritually dead man cannot do the least to make himself spiritually alive. He doesn't even know that he is spiritually dead. . . . In his own strength he cannot grasp the idea to arise from his spiritual death, let alone that he should do something to effect his waking up and arising. . . . If Christ did not come first with his grace, if he did not seek them . . . all men would have to remain in their spiritual death . . . and eventually fall into eternal death.[106]

Because natural man is spiritually dead, he could not come to faith if he would; however, it is also true that he would not if he could, because he is also an enemy of God. Through the Fall man lost his concreated fear, love, and trust in God. By nature man thinks of God as his enemy who wants to destroy him.[107] "As long as the Holy Ghost does not work in him, he can do nothing but resist. He is worse than a stick or stone."[108]

Because of original sin, everything that a man does, though it may shine as the sun, is darkness, sinful, unspiritual and ungodly.[109] True as it is that natural man can perform works of civil righteousness, nevertheless, these works are worthless before God because they flow from the poisonous source of the fear of punishment, the desire for reward, or from pride and self-righteousness.[110]

---

[106]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 561. Cf. Ibid., pp. 434-435.

[107]Ibid., p. 473. Walther, Ibid., p. 128, points out that it is this servile fear of God which keeps people from coming to Christ even when the Gospel is preached. In fact, even Christians cannot free themselves entirely of it. Ibid., p. 473.

[108]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 113.

[109]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 213.

[110]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 336. Cf. Ibid., p. 432.

Not only is man an enemy of God, but God is also his enemy.[111]

> Whoever is not a child of God, does not have a gracious God. God does not love him as his Father. God has no pleasure in him, yes, God must hate him as his enemy.[112]

Only a keen sense of what sin is enables one to understand this enmity of God.

> Every sin is rebellion in the realm of God's rule. . . . Every sin is a declaration of enmity against God and his holy will, a wicked turning away of the creature from his creator; and the consequence of sin is therefore necessary, that it arouses God's anger, demands that according to his justice he punish, indeed, demands of God that he exclude man from fellowship with Him and ban him to the place of eternal punishment and darkness.[113]

A great change, therefore, must take place in natural man if he is to see the Kingdom of God. He must become a partaker of God's second creation, the redemption, by having life breathed into him again by the Almighty.[114]

Summary

Walther's doctrine of man is, first of all, a blunt repudiation of the affirmation of Rationalism which gives man the capacity to become a Christian if he would and of Pietism which, in effect, throws man back upon his own resources, his prayers and his wrestling, until he feels him-

---

[111] Ibid., p. 595.

[112] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 41.

[113] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 605.

[114] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 188.

self in the state of grace. On the contrary, Walther preaches the utter incapacity of man either to will or to do anything good in the spiritual realm.

At the same time, Walther's doctrine of man serves to magnify the monergism of God's grace. The righteousness which avails before God is a foreign righteousness and justification is something which takes place in the heart of God without regard to man's work. This thought is expanded in the next section.

The Justification of the World Through Christ

In the kingdom instituted by Christ, the main point is the forgiveness of sins.[115] This doctrine, the center also of Walther's preaching, declares that

> After all men fell and became sinners, they do not become righteous in this way that they are rich in deeds, make themselves worthy and righteous, but only in this way, that God does not charge their sins to them, but forgives them, and declares them righteous by grace, although they are and remain sinners, on account of the reconciliation accomplished for them by Christ. The justification of a man which avails before God and saves him is, therefore, nothing else but the forgiveness of sin and the crediting to him of the righteousness which Christ won for him by his life, suffering, and death.[116]

This doctrine distinguished the Christian religion from

---

[115]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 316.

[116]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 509. Cf. "Die Lehre von der Rechtfertigung," Lehre und Wehre, XIII (March, 1867), 76-86.

all others. In all other religions man can be saved partly through outwardly good works, partly through inward moral improvement.[117] Whenever false teachers have arisen in the church, they have failed to present this doctrine properly. Conversely, when this doctrine is properly taught, "all the doctrines which are ruinous must disappear as fog before the sun."[118]

The justification of the sinner is from first to last an activity in the heart of God. Having foreseen the fall of man from eternity, God in mercy covenanted with His Son that if he would redeem the world, "He would impute the atonement to all men and would declare righteous all who would believe in him."[119] The doctrine of justification, then, rests

> on the work and word of reconciliation of Jesus Christ. . . . for should even God want to forgive us out of grace, his stern, inviolable righteousness would eternally object to it. God's eternal wisdom . . . knew and devised means. And what did God do? Since we men of ourselves could not pay the incalculable guilt of our sins and God's righteousness would not declare us righteous without payment of them, behold--oh, wonder of wonders--God commanded his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to become a man and imputed our guilt of sin to him; and he, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, paid our debt in our place through his holy life and bitter suffering and death. And when he had paid our debt to the last penny, God the Father again

---

[117] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 275.

[118] Ibid., p. 262.

[119] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 217. Walther scores the idea that in the Old Testament people thought of God as an angry God and that Christ came and taught that God is the Father of all men and that all men are his children. Ibid., p. 39.

> awakened him from the dead and gave him authority to have the completed payment of their debt proclaimed, offered, and presented to all men and with it forgiveness, righteousness, life, and salvation. . . . Can righteousness still hinder grace from declaring such a debtor debt free? Must not righteousness itself rather pass the sentence of grace? Yes, that is the way it is, my friends. . . . Thus we are assured that the sinner's justification by the Gospel stands unshakable, resting on God's righteousness, holiness, and faithfulness, as well as on his goodness and mercy. It is based on the fact that God's Son has already reconciled all men, paid their debt of sin, won and offered them forgiveness and righteousness.[120]

The goal of Christ's entire work, therefore, was the justification of fallen mankind.[121] It was to reconcile God.[122]

Christ did not come into the world, therefore, to be a second Moses and to rule with the hammer of the Law.[123] Instead, he came to reveal the Father.[124] "Who imagines God otherwise than as he has revealed himself in Christ, has no God but prays to a dream picture of his own imagination."[125] He came as a doctor who wants to heal, as a Savior who wants to save,[126] as a Shepherd who wants to

---

[120]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 276.

[121]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 206. Cf. Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 357.

[122]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 212. This expression, "Gott zu versoehnen," quite prevalent in the Lutheran tradition, bothers me. It seems more Pauline to say that God in Christ reconciled the world to himself. 2 Corinthians 5:19.

[123]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 316.

[124]Ibid., p. 499.

[125]Ibid.

[126]Ibid., p. 45.

give, to guard, and to rule with the staff of the Gospel.[127] He desires our salvation more than we do.[128]

Christ in his person was alone suited to the task of redeeming the world, for he alone was true God and true man.[129] He had to be holy to die in our place innocently.

> He also had to be God Himself, in order that he himself would not be under God's Law, fulfill it for us, conquer sin, death and hell, and be able to win a perfect righteousness, innocence, and blessedness for us. . . . Only Jesus, God and man in one person could do this. . . . He trod the winepress of God's wrath alone, and he alone could tread it. . . . Woe to the man, therefore, who wants to be saved and does not seek his salvation alone in Christ.[130]

Christ's entire life and death, therefore, was substitutionary. He was the substitute for the whole fallen race.[131] As the substitute for all men Christ "permitted the sins of all men to be charged to him, fulfilled the Law in our stead, endured the punishment of all men even to burial in the dust of the earth."[132] Speaking of Christ's temptation in the wilderness Walther speaks of the substitutionary work of Christ:

Christ did not wage this war for himself. He battled

---

[127] Ibid., pp. 315-316.

[128] Ibid., pp. 314-315.

[129] Ibid., p. 250.

[130] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 111. Cf. Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 268.

[131] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 279.

[132] Ibid., p. 283.

> as the surety, the mediator, the substitute of the whole human race, for all men, for us who are gathered here. Through sin all men sold themselves to Satan; all became his servants and subjects of his kingdom. To redeem and save men Christ came as the real owner of the souls of men in order to conquer Satan, destroy his kingdom, take his booty away again, free us from all his power, and lead all men through the kingdom of grace to the kingdom of glory.[133]

"Burdened with our sins he came into the world, burdened with our sins he walked upon this world, burdened with our sins . . . he died."[134] Walther describes Christ's substitution for us most graphically when he compares Christ with David:

> If we wish to understand this battle properly, we must imagine that the whole human race was gathered on one side in the wilderness. On the other, the army of the spirits of hell, Satan, the giant of hell, at their head. We must imagine how Satan challenged man to a duel. There was no one who dared attempt the fearful struggle. They could expect nothing else but to be and remain the eternal slaves of Satan. But see, God's Son, the real David of Bethlehem, stepped up, of humble appearance it is true, yet full of the invisible power of God. . . . Had Christ been conquered in the wilderness, woe unto us. However, happy are you; Christ won, won gloriously, not for himself but for us. The bonds are severed, and we are free. Everything which we had lost through the fall in paradise Christ won again for us in the wilderness.[135]

As humanity's substitute Christ was obliged to fulfill the Law of God which no man could keep and to suffer the consequences of the world's sin. His entire life, therefore, comprises his atoning activity. Hence Walther can say that

---

[133]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 110.

[134]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 217.

[135]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 110-111.

because of Christ's flight into Egypt, our heavenly homeland now stands open for all.[136] Christ's victory over the devil in the wilderness was the first defeat of the infernal enemy.[137] When Christ prayed, when he obeyed his Father, when he fulfilled the Law, all of this he did humbly and freely,

> in order to atone for the pride and self-exaltation of men, who took to themselves God's honor and so have become rebels against the sovereign God and his enemies, to reconcile, with God and with himself, to redeem and save.[138]

Christ's death fulfilled the last demand of the Law. It was the last payment of punishment for sin.[139] Through his bloody death upon the cross Christ crushed the head of the serpent.[140] The grave, too, was a punishment which Christ had to endure for our salvation.[141]

It is significant to note that Walther speaks of Christ's atoning work, first of all, in terms of the paying of a debt. Speaking of Christ's passion he says:

> By that means he wanted to pay for us; by that means he wanted to present to God a sufficient ransom for the sins of all men and to reconcile the whole sinful world to God.[142]

---

[136] Ibid., p. 445.

[137] Ibid., p. 110.

[138] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 253.

[139] Ibid., p. 271.

[140] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 110.

[141] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 273.

[142] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 211.

Through the payment of the debt to God[143] reconciliation with God is effected between the offending world and God.[144] Through Christ "man who had become God's enemy is reconciled with God."[145]

Just as frequently, if not more frequently, Walther speaks of the work of Christ in terms of delivering humanity from the death-grip of the tyrants. He pictures all men by nature as slaves of sin, Satan, death, and hell.[146] But Christ became the death of death, the sin of sin, the Law of the law, the poison of poison.[147] The defeat of the devil in the wilderness was the first defeat of the infernal foe and Christ "did not leave the field until He had won the last engagement for us on the cross and could cry, 'It is finished.'"[148] Now, as a result of Christ's victory for us

> Everything that formerly held our souls prisoner has now become our prisoner. By nature we were prisoners of sin; now it has become our prisoner. It can tempt, and it is good that we are tempted that our faith may not grow cold, but ultimately even it must go down in defeat as the cases of David and Peter prove. Through Christ death has become the prisoner of all believers. The fact of death causes us to prepare more earnestly for our departure. The Law curses and injures the be-

---

[143]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 601.

[144]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 135.

[145]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 32.

[146]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 371.

[147]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 253.

[148]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 110.

> lievers no more but only drives them to seek grace and blessing from Christ. By nature the devil has all men under his tyranny, but in Christ he is our captive. One little word can fell him.[149]

Positively, Christ won for all men freedom so that they may leave the prison of God's wrath,[150] and have life, and immortality.[151]

Great as was the victory of Christ for the world, we would never know whether he had sufficiently atoned for the sins of all apart from His resurrection. In fact, we would have every reason to doubt that the ransom had been paid.[152] But Christ did rise. His resurrection therefore

> is not only an added stone in the structure of salvation, but the cornerstone. The resurrection is not only a sparkling gem in the crown of our redemption but the very crown itself. God the Father has himself declared by the resurrection that He will demand no more payment from us. . . . It is the absolution pronounced by God Himself on all men, all sinners, all the world, and sealed in a most glorious way.[153]

It is

> the echo coming down from heaven of the cry sent heavenward from the cross: "It is finished." It is the waving of the flag of peace from heaven. It is God's cry to all the world: "Everything is ready; come to the marriage."[154]

---

[149]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 253.

[150]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 338.

[151]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 194-196. Cf. Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 610.

[152]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 263.

[153]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 159-161.

[154]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 307.

Furthermore, the resurrection is God's declaration of freedom for all men.

> the resurrection . . . is the triumphant procession which Christ as the substitute for all men held on earth after his victorious battle with the sins of the whole world; and is a triumphal procession of all the redeemed, freed, sinful world. It is the incontestable revelation before heaven and earth that through Christ's death sin has lost its power, death its sting, and hell its victory. It is the divine evidence that the deliverer of men has conquered, that the sins of men are actually blotted out, and therefore that death is actually killed, and their hell really destroyed. It is the loud cry from the throne of the Father, the Judge of the whole world himself to all men: "Leave your prison, all people; your tyrant, sin, is dethroned; your executioners, death and hell, are conquered; their right to torment and condemn you is taken from you; you are free!"[155]

All of this is equivalent to saying that the resurrection of Christ

> is the justification of all men which has already taken place. As really as all the world hung on the cross and atoned for their sins when Christ hung on the cross, so really all the world, every sinner, arose justified when Christ arose.[156]

Justification which avails before God, then, is nothing else but the forgiveness of sins and the crediting to the sinner of Christ's righteousness, won by his life, suffering, and death.[157]

> Man's justification by the Gospel is not a deed which man himself does, but which is done to him by God. It is not something that goes on in man's heart but something which goes on outside of man in the heart of God. It is not to be compared to the action of a doctor who

---

[155]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 201

[156]Ibid., p. 213.

[157]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 509.

> actually frees a sick person of his sickness and restores him to health, but it is to be compared to the action of a judge who acquits an indicted and convicted criminal not only releasing him from all punishment but even in spite of his crimes awarding him all the rights of a citizen of good reputation. Man's justification by the Gospel is not to be compared to an actual cleansing from stains but to the putting on of a beautiful white garment which covers the stains. It is, in a word, the forgiveness of sins and such a forgiveness according to which God views the man as though he had never sinned, as though he always were as perfectly holy and righteous as God's Law demands all men to be.[158]

From all that has been said thus far it is evident that good works do not and cannot enter into the doctrine of justification. God simply does not ask

> how much sin or how much good a man has, but only whether he belongs to the order of sinners and whether he wants to take as his own the foreign righteousness which Christ has earned for him.[159]

Furthermore, it is really ridiculous to think of our works in connection with justification, for we have none.

> It cannot be our works before conversion, because they are nothing but sin. It cannot be our faith, for faith is God's work and can never become ours. It cannot be our sanctification after conversion, because that is incomplete and spotted with a thousand sins.[160]

To want to be saved by works is only to struggle against God's righteousness, to battle against his grace, and to surrender ourselves to righteousness without grace which spells inevitable damnation.[161]

---

[158]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 276. Cf. Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 598. 432.

[159]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 511.

[160]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 185-186.

[161]Ibid., p. 185.

The righteousness which avails before God is given not to the man who wishes to be pious, but only to the poor sinner.[162] It is this fact which makes the doctrine of justification so comforting to the Christian.[163]

> If God's Word would tell us that in addition to Christ, in addition to grace, in addition to faith, works were also necessary for salvation, we would never be joyously certain of our state of grace and salvation or we could never be certain which works would be necessary to please God and how many works would be necessary for our salvation. Then the Gospel would not be more comforting than the Law; Christ would not be the immovable rock of our hope and we would be forever cast into the hell of doubt.[164]

On the other hand, if we accept salvation by grace through faith alone, "we can become and remain certain every hour of our state of grace and our future salvation, even though we are and remain poor sinners."[165]

Summary

In his preaching of justification we have another evidence of the influence of Orthodoxy in Walther's theology. Plainly his theology of justification is Luther's. His description of the atonement as payment of debt and as deliverance from the tyrants is typically the Reformer's.

We notice, too, how in this doctrine Walther wards off

---

[162] Ibid.

[163] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 513.

[164] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 122.

[165] Ibid., p. 123.

the Roman perversion by asserting that justification is not a process but a forensic, judicial act which took place in the heart of God. In his emphasis on universal reconciliation through Christ, he repudiates the idea of the limited atonement of the Calvinists.

Worth noting, too, is Walther's repeated accent on the resurrection as the absolution pronounced by God upon the whole world. This note, so striking in apostolic preaching and so strong in Walther, is, it appears to me, more muffled than it deserves to be in twentieth century Lutheran preaching.

Furthermore, Walther distinguishes between objective and subjective justification. In this chapter he is concerned to establish that the death of Christ is the paying of the ransom for all and his resurrection the justification of the whole world. In the next section we shall learn how the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection are appropriated by the individual.

The New Life Through the Means of Grace

God has not only provided justification through Christ, but also offers, gives, and seals the forgiveness of sins to the individual through the means of grace. Man does not come to the kingdom, but the kingdom comes to men through the means of grace.[166] Without the means of grace no one

---

[166]Walther, Goldkoerner, p. 78.

could be sure of his salvation.

> Therefore we can be happy! Christ has not only won God's grace for the whole world but has also instituted three precious means of grace by which he offers, gives and appropriates, and seals his grace to men; and these three means of grace are: the Gospel, holy baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are three treasure chambers in which Christ has stored all the treasures of his grace; they are three rungs of the ladder of heaven. . . . they are three overflowing fountains of grace. . . . They are three hands of the Triune God with which he hands us Christ's dearly bought grace. . . . They are three divine witnesses. . . . They are three golden keys of heaven which unlock the heaven of eternal blessedness and glory prepared for us by Christ; they are the path upon which grace comes to men and men to grace; the word is the divine letter of grace, and Communion his inviolable, eternally valid divine seal.[167]

As often as the Word is preached and the Sacraments are administered, the rich Lord of heaven visits us.[168] Through these means he wants to enter our hearts to cover our sins with his grace and to be our Savior, High Priest, Protector, and Comforter.[169]

> Apart from the Word, God converts no one.
>
> Those whom God's Word does not save and convert, nothing in heaven and earth can save and convert. The Word of God is the only tree of life which God has planted on earth . . . the only key of the heaven of heaven which God has thrown down from heaven. With it alone we can unlock the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem which were closed to sinners.[170]

The chief means of grace is the Word of God. As often as

---

[167]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 172.

[168]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 370.

[169]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 4-5.

[170]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 222.

one hears the Word or reads his Bible, God himself steps before him and says: "Thy sins be forgiven thee." In the New Testament God has added glorious visible signs, Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper.[171]

Holy Baptism is the open door by which one enters into the kingdom of grace founded by Christ. In Baptism a person receives a good conscience.

> His sins are washed away; his soul is cleansed; Christ is put on like a garment; he is born again a child of God's grace; . . . . All this happens not on the condition that he has been pious and has done good works, but alone for Christ's sake.[172]

Baptism has this great power only because the Word of promise is connected with the water of baptism.[173]

> If Holy Baptism is administered according to Christ's institution among those who deem it a powerless ceremony, it remains a baptism, a washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.[174]

Faith takes the blessings in baptism, and a person remains an heir of eternal life as long as he believes in it.[175]

The Holy Supper "is the very crown of all the means of grace which Christ has conferred upon the Christian Church."[176] It is not a work by which we show our

---

[171]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 516.

[172]Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 165-166.

[173]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 215-216.

[174]Ibid., p. 75.

[175]Ibid.

[176]Ibid., p. 155.

miserable love to Him, but a work of Christ's greatest love.[177] For in the Sacrament the forgiveness of sins is not only announced and imparted, "but Christ at the same time gives his Christians his very body and blood as a pledge."[178] People attend the Lord's Supper not only for the strengthening of their own faith but also for the sake of their neighbor, their brethren and the world. By celebrating the Sacrament, they preach the crucified Christ to the world and demonstrate that they are Christ's church.[179]

The Sacraments are a bulwark of defense for the Christian against doubt and despair, for the Christian can say:

> If Christ wanted to condemn me immediately, he just could not. He has made a covenant of grace with me and as confirmation of it he has given me a pledge, Holy Baptism. . . . How dare I doubt that I share in Christ's reconciliation or whether my sins are forgiven. Christ has given me that very body which he offered God on the cross for the sins of the world. He has given me to drink of the very blood which flowed on Golgotha for the forgiveness of all.[180]

It should be noted in passing that Walther places a good measure of emphasis also on private absolution. "In private absolution God permits the Church to say to every sinner, 'In his name, be of good cheer; thy sins are for-

---

[177]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 177.

[178]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 155.

[179]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 175.

[180]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 317.

given thee."[181]

It is evident that the Word of God is not only an announcement that the sins of all men have been erased through Christ; it is at the same time, a mighty power.[182]

> When the Word is heard or read or meditated upon, it has the wonderful power to persuade man of his misery when he lives without God, to work in him a longing for union with God, to open his heart closed by nature, and so, if the man does not willfully resist, at last to bring God himself into his heart. The Word of God is like a hammer that breaks the rock-like heart of man, and like a fire which melts his iron will. It is, at the same time, like the rustling of a wind of love with which God himself as the dew and rain of heaven pours itself into the quaking and opened heart of man.[183]

It has power enough to give youth a new heart,[184] to make stony hearts pliable, to save condemned sinners, to make godless people pious.[185] With the three words: "It is written" Christ was able to crush the entrenchments and bulwarks of the hellish spirit.[186] God's Word is so powerful that even a fragment of its most necessary fundamental doctrines can work man's salvation.[187]

---

[181] Ibid.

[182] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 93.

[183] Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 367-368. Cf. Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 222.

[184] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 117.

[185] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 222.

[186] Ibid., p. 114.

[187] Ibid., p. 75.

The Holy Spirit and the Word

The Word has this great power because inseparably connected with it is the Holy Spirit. The Word is

> a habitation of the Holy Ghost who is always inseparably united with it. It is permeated with the self-same Spirit as glowing steel with fire, so that the one in whose ear the Word of Christ sounds is inflamed with it in his heart unless he deliberately closes his heart and hardens it against it.[188]

God follows man everywhere with his love, through his outward Word and inwardly through the promptings of the Spirit.[189] It is the Holy Spirit who presses into the hearts of men through the word causing them to know not only their complete unworthiness, but also the boundless grace of God in Christ.[190] If, therefore, a person hears and keeps God's Word, the finger of God, or the Holy Ghost, frees him from the bonds of the devil with divine power.[191]

In short, the Holy Spirit never works without means, and the only means which he does use in accomplishing the work of conversion is the Word.[192]

In the work of conversion, the Holy Spirit must do

---

[188]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 620.

[189]Ibid., p. 424.

[190]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 75.

[191]Ibid., p. 126.

[192]Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 243-244.

everything.[193] As little as a person is responsible for his physical birth, so little is he responsible for his spiritual rebirth.[194] Walther therefore categorically rejects the views that man is by nature good but becomes corrupt through poor training and bad example; that as man is born he is neither evil nor good; that by nature man has the free-will to choose the good and reject the evil; others suppose that man could not finish the work of conversion but could at least begin it; then the Holy Spirit would help him. Others suppose that man could do nothing to begin his conversion but when God has made a start, "then the power of his will which lies dormant awakens and then he can carry on by himself and finish the work begun by God."[195] But all of these gross errors only confirm man in his self-righteousness and rob God of His glory.[196]

Without the Holy Spirit no one can come to faith. The Spirit must interpret the Scriptures for us, "he must take the covering from our eyes and show us the sweet kernel of it; otherwise we have the Scriptures in our hands without light in our heart."[197]

> Though a person may have ever so great a knowledge of Christian doctrine, if he does not have this knowledge

---

[193] Ibid., p. 164.

[194] Ibid., p. 243.

[195] Ibid., p. 113.

[196] Ibid.

[197] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 652.

> by the enlightenment of the Holy Ghost by gathering it from God's Word with the help of reason, this knowledge is not really Christian knowledge. If a person has a certain type of faith in Christ, if he does not have it by the working of the Holy Ghost but by his own efforts, his faith is not the true Christian faith. If a person has begun to live outwardly the Christian life, but if this life is not a fruit of the Holy Spirit dwelling within him, if it is his own work, his entire life, even though it may outwardly surpass that of all true Christians, is not a true Christian life. As God the Father alone has created us human beings, as God the Son alone has bought us to be his possession, so the Holy Spirit alone gives us the rebirth and makes us true Christians.[198]

To accomplish the work of conversion, the Holy Spirit uses the two principal doctrines of the Word, the Law and the Gospel. Through the Law he leads men to repentance; through the Gospel, to faith. Since an understanding of these two doctrines is essential both for an understanding of the Scriptures and of Walther's theological accents, we shall examine briefly the nature, function, and effect of each.

The Spirit uses the Law

Through the Law God reveals his holiness and righteousness.[199] He demands that we love him with our heart (our will), our soul (our emotions) and our mind (our reason).[200] The Law demands the whole man, his thoughts, words, and deeds.[201] Moreover, the Law reveals the wrath of God against

---

[198]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 268.

[199]Ibid., p. 60.

[200]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 314.

[201]Ibid., p. 250.

every transgression of the Law.

> If we do not want to believe the terrible threats of the Law against sin, God has written it upon Golgotha in bloody letters so legible that all the excuses of our doubt are taken away. Upon Christ's cross is written before the eyes of all men: God carries out his threats; sinner, you must die![202]

The Law demands and threatens, but it does not empower us to do what it demands in order to escape the deserved punishment. Even the threats of God's eternal displeasure cannot change our nature.[203]

The function of the Law is to show us how sinful we are, that before God we are all sinners.[204] Before a person can be converted, the Law like a roaring hurricane descending from heaven must awaken and startle him from spiritual sleep.[205] Hence a person should look into the mirror of the divine Law, ponder its demands and threats, compare his life with its demands in order to realize the greatness of his own sin.[206]

> Every man who wants to come to joy in Christ's kingdom must first hear and read God's Law and learn from it what a wretched, fallen creature he is; he must realize that all his good works, his shining deeds and piety, are nothing but empty deception before God and that he is by nature a child of wrath, who has deserved

---

[202]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 190-191.

[203]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 250.

[204]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 60.

[205]Ibid., p. 263.

[206]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 35.

hell, death, and damnation.[207]

The Law not only reveals sin, but also condemns sin.

> The Law condemns all men as transgressors before God and therefore when God judges according to the Law as a righteous judge he must damn all men eternally.[208]

Although the Law reveals sin and condemns it, it provides no way of escape or return.[209]

The effects which the Law produces are threefold. In the first place, the Law works wrath in the heart of the hearer. When a pastor rebukes pet sins, people clamor, "He wants to rule over us. Away with him."[210] Again, the Law makes men hypocrites, when a person ignorant of the spiritual demands of the Law imagines that he can keep it.[211] Finally, when a person realizes that the Law demands infinitely more than he can accomplish, he is plunged into despair.[212] Through the Law the Holy Spirit works in a person a wholesome fright over his sinful condition and a yearning to be delivered from the consequences of his sin.[213] "These pangs are nothing but the hopeful birth pains of the new birth . . . nothing else but the hunger which the Holy Ghost according

---

[207]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 324-325.

[208]Ibid., p. 507.

[209]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 232.

[210]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 39.

[211]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 60.

[212]Ibid.,

[213]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 126.

to God's grace awakens. . . ."[214] When the Law has led a person to despair of himself and to look elsewhere for help, then it has accomplished its office.[215] Beyond this the Law does not and cannot go.

However, this is a most necessary work.

> The first part of conversion is a painful knowledge of our sins and heartfelt terror because of them. Without this experience no person is truly converted. . . . every person must perceive that without Christ he is truly a great, lost sinner, for so God describes all men; he must be filled with anxiety, fear, and terror over that fact, bowed, humbled, softened thereby.[216]

Without it no one would appreciate the Gospel. This is how Walther emphasizes this point in a Pentecost sermon:

> Bear this in mind, all of you who today have come into this church in order to celebrate Pentecost with us, you who in your hearts are not yet poor sinners, but without a care for your salvation live on with the idea that people such as you cannot fail to enter heaven. The preaching of God's wonderful works for the redemption of the world has not helped you at all. If I were to summon you to take comfort in this great work of God, I would strengthen you only the more in your security and comfort you right into hell. No, before you can experience God's grace, you must first learn to feel God's wrath; before you can joyfully consider yourselves righteous before God by grace through Christ, you must in sorrow learn to know that you are unrighteous before God without Christ. . . . Before the soothing balm of comfort can be spread on the boils caused by sin, the sharp knife of the Law must first lance them until they bleed and pain you.[217]

There can be no living faith without true repentance, no

---

[214]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 324-325.

[215]Ibid., p. 437.

[216]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 189.

[217]Ibid., p. 270.

spiritual joy without spiritual sorrow.[218] The plant of faith cannot spring up in a heart filled with the thorns of indifference toward sin; the oil of divine comfort cannot enter a heart stony and unbroken.[219] Although Christ seeks all men, he seeks those most carefully and loves them most tenderly who begin to preceive their sins and become frightened and despair of themselves.[220]

> Only he can come to Christ who first of all comes not as a wise and enlightened, but as an unwise and blind person, not as a righteous but as an unrighteous, not as a holy person, but as a godless, not as one already without sin of himself, but as a lost and damned person. . . . Furthermore, only he can come to Christ who leaves the world entirely . . . who honors . . . who gives his whole heart to Christ. . . .[221]

To come to the Heavenly Father, we must come as poor sinners.[222]

However, a person's repentance should be sincere. A person must be serious about it. "His resolution to learn to know himself must not be like the hoar-frost which melts at the first rays of the sun."[223]

> Christ is a physician of sick people. Whoever goes to him without painfully feeling the sickness of his sins and without seeking a cure for them from him is only pretending. The Gospel of grace is a meal of grace. Whoever does not hunger and thirst after righteousness merely acts as if he eats that meal. He

---

[218] Ibid., p. 43.

[219] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 178.

[220] Ibid., p. 231.

[221] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 406.

[222] Ibid., p. 278.

[223] Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 131-132.

> deceives only himself. . . . Many so-called Christians have never experienced true sorrow over their sins. Yet such imagine that they have faith because they not only go diligently to church and the Holy Supper but also conduct a family altar at home. Their hope of being saved is also vain.[224]

However, it is a serious mistake for one who is already contrite to imagine that he must first show signs of moral improvement before he can comfort himself with the grace of God. Out of his own painful university experience Walther writes:

> That you fight against your misery in sin, pray and weep, is indeed proper, but that you do not want to believe on Christ until you notice that the power of sin has been broken in you, that is a deception of the heart. . . . that is the whispering of Satan. . . . No, since you realize your need, you are already before the open door of grace. You need only through faith to go in.[225]

God-pleasing moral improvement is impossible for a contrite sinner, for repentance which precedes faith is not an incipient betterment of the heart.[226] Instead, therefore, of waiting to achieve the impossible, the terrified sinner is to flee to the waiting arms of his Savior. This is how Walther stresses this point in a Sylvester Eve sermon:

> When God in his Word commands us to perceive the host, greatness, and abominableness of our sins, he does not do that to have us despair or have us struggle with and wait for God for a long time until he is gracious; it is our God's intention that the moment we are frightened over our sins we should in firm faith

---

[224] Ibid., pp. 178-179.

[225] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 128.

[226] Ibid., p. 203.

> flee for refuge to his grace, mercy, and faithfulness in Christ Jesus which has already been won for us. . . . If you have spent this year in sins and vanities, if you have gone so far as to ridicule Christianity, repentance and conversion; or if you have only acted like a Christian but secretly served this or that sin, or if you were not serious about your Christianity, then know this: your Savior is here at the end of the year and says to you: "Soon the bell which announces the end of the old year will strike. O, come quickly to me before it strikes; only come as a poor sinner, and I will have mercy on you. For him that cometh to me, no matter who he may be, and if he were the greatest of all sinners, I will not cast him out." O, my dear hearer, accept this friendly invitation of your God and Savior. Flee, my poor sinner, flee confidently to God's mercy and faithfulness in Christ Jesus and God will remove the burden of your sins; . . . .[227]

A person must indeed despair of his own good works, his own betterment and his own piety, and must acknowledge that he is a lost, damned sinner. However, he is not to despair of God's grace in Christ. Rather he must hold to him in firm faith.

> Whoever does that . . . in that moment God declares righteous. And whoever remains in this faith remains justified before God and will assuredly be saved, as sure as God is in heaven and his Word is eternal truth.[228]

The Gospel

The Word of God that declares us righteous is the Gospel. It is radically different from the Law in its contents,

---

[227]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 46.

[228]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 509-510.

function, and effect. Whereas man has the Law written in his heart, no man could have invented or discovered the Gospel.[229] The Gospel is a greater light than the Law, for while the Law reveals to us God's holiness and righteousness, the Gospel declares that God is glorious in us because he gives us his glorious treasures: righteousness, life and salvation.[230] Unlike the Law, it does not demand, accuse, and impose burdens, but offers help, gives righteousness, and takes away the load.

> O glorious Gospel! O pardoned world, O sinful world where this sermon dare resound! How gloriously are you visited! The Gospel is not a doctrine which demands something from poor, weak men as does the Law, but offers all of them help for time and eternity. The Gospel does not accuse men of being sinners, but immediately gives them Christ's righteousness in return. It does not impose a new burden, but takes away the load. The Gospel does not demand that man be someone else, but only that he despair of his own power and accept the grace which makes him someone else. The Gospel makes the vale of tears in this world the annex of heaven, which it opens to us wherever we are. In short, the Gospel is the very teaching which we sinful men need.[231]

The Gospel is God's letter to the whole world declaring that God has been paid through the death of his Son and that the debts of all sinners are absolved.[232]

> Preaching the Gospel is merely saying to all men: Sinners, rejoice, Christ has already blotted out your sins; . . . Christ has already completed the work of your salvation. Do not suppose that you must first

---

[229]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 59.

[230]Ibid., p. 60.

[231]Ibid.; cf. Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 512.

[232]Ibid., p. 601.

> reconcile God through any suffering and atone for your sins. Do not suppose that you must do good works, that you must save yourself by your repentance, by your remorse, by your improvement, by your struggles, by your wrestlings. No, all this has already taken place. You should merely receive what Christ has already done and suffered for you, appropriate it, comfort yourself with it, believe it, walk and remain in this faith, and finally be saved through this faith. . . . Just because the Gospel is an absolution for all men, because of the completed redemption of the world, a preacher can and should assure each person who desires forgiveness that in God's name his sins are forgiven.[233]

From this it is evident that the first function of the Gospel is to comfort distressed sinners. For one grieving over his own sinfulness, the Gospel is

> the dew of heaven which falls upon a parched, withered land, the pardon for one groaning in prison, a rescue ship for him who hangs from a cliff in the middle of the sea, the opening of the doors of heaven to him who struggles with the doors of death.[234]

In the Gospel God himself steps before us and says: "Be comforted, your sins are forgiven."[235] The Gospel says:

> Be comforted, you straying lamb; you are not yet lost. See, here is your shepherd. Your Good Shepherd brings you to his flock, leads you in the green pastures of his grace, protects you from all danger, and will finally lead you to the heavenly flock through the gates of death.[236]

Another function of the Gospel is to bring men to a saving faith in Christ. If a person in his anxiety over his sin asks:

---

[233]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 167-168.

[234]Ibid., p. 35.

[235]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 516.

[236]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 232.

> "What must I do to be saved?" he hears in the Gospel the comforting reply: "Believe on the Lord Jesus, Savior of sinners, and you shall be saved." And if he clings to this promise, even with only the sigh, "Ah, if I also could believe that," the Holy Spirit has done his work in him.[237]

Finally, it is the Gospel which provides the motive power for the sanctified life.

> God's Word like a loud voice enters the ear and chases the spiritual sleep of the soul; it gives another heart, fills it with hatred and horror of sin and with love to God, to his commandments and to all good. It becomes a dwelling place of the Spirit.[238]

The effect of the Gospel is twofold. To some it is a savor of death unto death.

> Those still in the blindness of their sin and misery the Gospel delights as little as the well spread table the sated, the most wonderful painting, the blind, the most beautiful harmonies, the deaf.[239]

Although the Holy Spirit seriously desires their conversion, they willfully resist. God compels no one to be converted. God finally lets the man go who despises his every call of grace, enticement, urgent admonition, and earnest warning. "God abandons him to that damnation which he who resists has really chosen for himself."[240]

However, for those who accept the Spirit's invitation, the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The Gospel effects in him the radical change called conversion.

---

[237] Ibid., pp. 215-216.

[238] Ibid., p. 9.

[239] Ibid., p. 35.

[240] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 184.

> The rebirth according to the meaning of the word can be nothing else than a complete renewing of the whole man. As a physical birth gives us spiritual life, movement, desires, will, understanding and powers, the rebirth must give us new spiritual movement, desires, will, understanding and powers. . . . He is not only justified; he is not only changed from a child of wrath to a child of grace, from a sinner to a righteous person, from one damned to a saint, he not only steps from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, but because this takes place the man is awakened from his natural spiritual death and comes to spiritual life. . . . He no longer considers the Gospel as foolishness . . . but a new spiritual revelation. . . . A person who truly believes becomes a temple of the Holy Ghost who now ceaselessly incites him to all good works. . . . such a person no longer judges according to reason . . . but the Word of God takes complete possession of his soul. . . . He thinks and judges according to the Word. He speaks according to the Word; he lives according to the Word; he is ready to endure and to suffer everything for the Word and, if necessary, to die for it.[241]

Faith

In one word, that which the Holy Spirit gives through the Gospel is faith,

> the God-given conviction of the truth of God's Word and a God-given hope that one is reconciled with God through Christ, that one stands in grace, is righteous before God and an heir of everlasting life.[242]

It is by this faith that all patriots, prophets, and saints were saved in Old Testament times and by which we, too, are saved.

Although saving faith is so simple that even a child can grasp it, it is, at the same time, so mysterious that

---

[241] Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 214-215.

[242] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 206.

the learned may sound its depths without reaching bottom.[243] Some confuse saving faith with obedience. They picture Christ as another Moses, and view the demand of faith as a keeping of the golden rule. Even those who think themselves Christians confuse saving faith with going to church and communion, etc. Others interpret faith as merely an historical faith that Christ is God's Son and the Savior of the world. But this sort of faith even the devils have.[244] Saving faith is something which must be experienced. The Christian must come to the point where he says: "Christ is mine, I have him; he has seized me and I embrace him and will hold fast to him, and nothing, nothing shall tear me away from him."[245]

> If I were to state briefly the essence of faith, it is this: A person relies on Christ from his heart; he builds upon the fact that Christ is his Savior, his Redeemer, his Mediator, that Christ has atoned for his sins and borne his guilt. Such a heartfelt, living trust in Christ is not as easy as one might think. Such a trust arises in a man only when other things no longer satisfy him, when he is finished with the world, when he finds nothing more within himself upon which to build his salvation. Using the words of the Bible, living faith arises in a man only when he is weary and heavy laden, when he looks around for a helper for his soul as a deathly sick person looks for a doctor, as the hungry and thirsty hunt for food and drink, as the wanderer in the dark night searches for the correct way. . . .
>
> You see, if a person is really weary and heavy laden . . . and if the teaching of Christ is then preached to him,

---

[243] Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 129-130. Cf. Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 303.

[244] Ibid., p. 195.

[245] Ibid., p. 663.

> this preaching makes a deep, wonderful impression on him; the Gospel does not merely convince his understanding; it enters deep into his soul. It seems to him as though thick scales fell from his eyes and thousands of heavy burdens from his heart. Not until then does he begin to trust Christ from his heart and without at first wanting to do that. He feels drawn to Christ with an invisible, sweet, heavenly power. Yes, just as a ship which has taken water sinks into the sea, so the person now sinks completely in Christ when he has taken the water of life from the gracious fulness of Christ.
>
> From that moment on, Christ, yes, the Triune God enters into him and makes him a temple of God. Everything in and about him becomes new. . . . Another mind, another love, other wishes and hopes than those which ruled in him formerly come into his heart. He now sees the whole world and his whole life in an entirely different light.[246]

Faith is such a precious gift of God because it is through faith that a person is justified before God.

> Whoever despairs of his own righteousness . . . and believes in Christ who perfectly fulfilled the Law for all men and by his innocent suffering and death bore and atoned for their sins, God graciously absolves from all his sins. God acts as though he had fulfilled the Law as perfectly as Christ himself. Whoever believes on Christ, though he may be hopelessly in debt to God has in the Gospel a receipt in full which God Himself has given. Whoever believes in Christ though he may have no good work which he can present to God has in the life, suffering, and death of Christ a merit of such value that God Himself will not condemn him. Before all angels and creatures he must declare him completely righteous.[247]

Furthermore, the sinner is justified before God by faith alone.

> There can be absolutely no other way. What must a debtor do whose bill has been paid by another that

---

[246]Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 129-130.

[247]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 250.

> he may be free of debt? He must accept the payment made for him. What must an offender do with whom the offended person has already become reconciled that he might also be reconciled? He must accept the reconciliation. What must the prisoner do whose prison has already been opened that he might enjoy freedom? He must accept the freedom given to him and leave the prison. What must the indicted and convicted criminal do who already is pardoned that he might enjoy his amnesty? He must accept it. Now look. The debt of all men's sins has already been paid for by Christ. God is reconciled. The prison of God's wrath and hell is opened. The amnesty of all men is accomplished and is announced and offered to all men by the Gospel. What should and can a person do in order to be able to enjoy all this? Nothing, absolutely nothing further but to accept all this; and that is exactly nothing else but believing. Yes, my friends, believing, believing is the only way whereby justification by the Gospel is acquired. Not because faith is such a good work or such an excellent condition of the heart, but God wants to and must consider a man righteous; nor because a person must do something even if only a little, but because man can do and has to do nothing, absolutely nothing for his justification because his righteousness has already been won by Christ and in the Gospel is offered, presented, and distributed to all who hear it. . . . This teaching is the treasure which only the Evangelical Lutheran Church has kept pure and to which it holds fast.[248]

As important as is the truth that we are justified by faith alone, it is important to remember that we are not saved because we believe in the sense that the good of our faith moves God to make us righteous.[249] Faith does not make a person better or more worthy than another. Even the believer is in himself just as unworthy a sinner as the most godless, unbelieving person in the world.[250] Faith is

---

[248] Ibid., p. 278. Cf. Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 308.

[249] Ibid.

[250] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 349.

indeed the way by which a person is helped, but it is not the work by which he deserves to be helped. A man is not saved on account of faith, but through faith or out of faith. Faith is praised in the Scriptures not because it deserves salvation, but because it appropriates it.[251]

> If no virtue can merit heaven, one cannot merit heaven through faith. . . . If one reads the Holy Scriptures one will not find a single passage which teaches that a person is saved because of his faith or that faith is the cause of salvation. No, the Bible . . . does not teach that man is saved because of faith, but through faith. It declares that the end of faith is salvation but never that faith is the cause of salvation. The Holy Scriptures really say that absolutely no work, no virtue, no merit or worthiness can save man; that Christ alone has done this work, Christ alone has merited everything. Christ alone has prepared the marriage feast of eternal life and man can be justified only by grace. But because man should share all this by grace, he must accept it. If he wants to enjoy and receive the benefits of it, he must seize it and make it his own and that means he must believe it. Hence according to Holy Writ faith is nothing else but the hand whereby man lays hold of this salvation which has been earned by Christ, the vessel wherein he gathers up the gifts of grace, the key by which he unlocks the heavenly treasure deposited for him. With his faith man therefore merits heaven as little as the beggar merits the gift given to him, for which he stretches out his hand to take it. . . . To be saved through faith actually means to be saved without merit by grace; and to be lost because of unbelief actually means nothing else than to be lost because a person does not accept the salvation which was offered to him. That faith does not save because it is a good work but only because it receives the salvation because it was given to him can be proved from the fact that even the faith of a believer is never perfect but always retains certain blemishes and defects. A Christian dare not build his salvation on his faith, but on Christ. Yes, whoever relies on his faith certainly has never come to true faith. With all his apparent devotion he is just as

---

[251]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 134-136.

> self-righteous as the unbeliever who wishes to be saved through his virtue and good works.[252]

To mingle works with the doctrine of justification by faith is, therefore, not only unnecessary and useless, but also obstructive, hurtful, and fatal.

> For whoever wants to contribute the least little thing to his justification before God, disavows God's grace. He forfeits God's complete and only valid merit, the only reconciling power of his bloody death and justifying means of his resurrection. . . . One does not believe in something so that it happens, but because it has happened. Open your eyes and see it; open your ears and hear it.[253]

As little as one is to rest his confidence on his faith as a good work, so little is one to rest his assurance that he is in the state of grace on his feelings. Walther points out that feelings are fickle. There are times when a person has besides the word of the Gospel also the inner happy voice in his heart which says: "Yes, you shall live." However, there are times when a person feels weak and miserable and does not feel the presence of Christ in his life.[254] If in such times a person based his assurance on his feelings he would easily despair. Instead of following this path, Walther advises:

> Even though you do not feel in your heart any sweet

---

[252]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 328.

[253]Ibid., pp. 162-163. Cf. Ibid., pp. 212-213.

[254]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 625.

> feelings of grace, do not let that hinder your believing, because feelings are changeable and deceptive. But God's Word and the Sacraments do not deceive you; you can rely on these in need and in death because they are witnesses of God on earth. And even though your heart says no, let God's Word be more sure to you.[255]

Instead of despairing because of his failure to feel the grace of God, the Christian should believe the Word until the hour comes when he will see what he has believed and enjoy what he has hoped for.[256] When a person hesitates to pray because of his own feeling of unworthiness because of his sin, he is to remember that though he is not worthy of being heard, his Christ, who intercedes for him, is worthy.[257] As a closing application to a Christmas sermon Walther says:

> Do not say: "I feel no grace." Simply bear in mind that God's saving grace did not appear in your hearts; it appeared outside of them, in God's heart. It lay there in the manger of Bethlehem, and today it reigns everywhere at the right hand of God the Father. You need not therefore first seek it; it has sought you out. O just accept it with joy.[258]

Instead of basing his assurance either on his faith as a good work or on his feeling, the Christian rests his confidence on the Word of God.

> The believer builds the certainty of his state of grace, his salvation, on the Word alone. The Word is the only credential which he can produce for his hope of eternal life; it alone is the first and last refuge of his conscience. "It is written!" is the first and last proof which he can give himself and others that he

---

[255] Ibid., p. 514.

[256] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 332.

[257] Ibid., p. 190.

[258] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 33.

does not deceive himself in his confidence in God.[259] The words of Scripture, which are the words of the eternal, almighty, and true God are a sure foundation for the Christian's faith.[260] Because the Word is the Word of God's grace in Christ, Walther can also say that the Christian seeks Christ in His Word when he no longer feels him in his heart.[261] He anchors his faith in the grace which Christ earned for all men through his life, suffering and death. This is the shield behind which he hides when his conscience accuses.[262] When the Christian reads that Christ is the reconciler, advocate, and mediator for the whole world, he should say: "Well, then, Christ is also my Savior, my reconciler, my advocate, my mediator."[263] Therefore a Christian looks for rest not in his own conscience, but in the heart of the crucified.[264]

One of the most significant accents in Walther's theology is the dynamic character of faith. True faith is not a dead acceptance as true what the Bible teaches. Even the devils are capable of this sort of faith. True faith is rather a heavenly power worked by the Holy Ghost.[265] God has no still-

---

[259] Ibid., p. 246.

[260] Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 211-212.

[261] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 46.

[262] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 221.

[263] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 332.

[264] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 192.

[265] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 178.

born children. But true faith is a heavenly light and godly power which makes the heart alive.[266] Supporting his argument Walther quotes Luther:

> Faith is a living and powerful thing; it is not a sleepy and lazy thought. It does not swim and hover above the heart as a bird over the water. But it is like water which has been heated and warmed by fire. Although it is still water, it is no longer cold, but is an altogether different water. In the same way faith, which is the work of the Holy Ghost, makes another heart, feeling, and disposition, and thus makes a new man.[267]

Walther himself describes true faith as

> such a living knowledge of Christ and His grace that one places the trust of his heart upon him. It is such a living persuasion that the Gospel of Christ is God's voice, word, and promise, that one with his whole heart trusts it, clutches the word of grace as his one and only anchor of hope, plants himself upon it as a rock, and holds to it as to the outstretched hand of God himself. The true faith is such a living, daring hope that that which Christ did and suffered for all was also for our benefit, that becomes so sure of the forgiveness of sins and his salvation that one is ready at any moment to die for it.[268]

In the power of his faith you can challenge the enemies of your soul, the world, death and the devil: "Come on. Speak up now if you can bring anything against me."[269] You can endure whatever the Lord may choose to send you.[270] And in the power of faith you can embrace everyone in love and regard

---

[266]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 524-525.

[267]Ibid.

[268]Ibid., p. 531.

[269]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 211.

[270]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 41.

your fellow-communicant as your second self.[271]

In his sermon on the healing of Jairus' daughter, Walther speaks at length of the glorious effects of faith.

> The moment a person begins to believe, God's anger turns into grace and pleasure. God forgives all his sins, declares him righteous, his child and heir of life. Immediately he gives his angels charge to accompany him on all his ways, to guard and protect him from all evil when he sleeps, to encamp around him as a heavenly sentry, and if he should die to bring his soul in triumph into the heavenly dwelling-place. Through faith he becomes so strong that as Jacob he prevails even in battle with God and conquers him. He has the power to unlock God's heart, lock up the gates of hell and damnation, open the doors of heaven and salvation and gather the heavenly hosts as his bosom companions.
>
> Faith does not display this glorious power without the believer noticing something of it. It shows itself as the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen. Faith makes the believer divinely sure that he has God's grace. It fills him with God's peace. It sends the Holy Spirit into his heart as a pledge and seal of his justification and salvation.
>
> Faith produces another effect. It creates a new heart in man. It not only cleanses the heart from its natural love of sin, it also plants an honest hatred and horror of all which displeases God and which he has forbidden in his Word. It also gives the person power to battle earnestly against all sin, love God above all things as his highest good and find his greatest pleasure in God and his friendship. Whoever has true faith is an enemy of his pet sins and resists them in daily battle. He can conquer all hatred against his most bitter enemies and offenders; yes, he can heartily love them, completely forget their offenses, and do good to them. He can do without all earthly things wherein natural man seeks his fortune and joy, and still be happy. For Christ's sake he joyfully endures the theft of all his temporal goods. For the sake of God's Word he joyfully exchanges the royal scepter for the beggar's staff. He is unconcerned whether he is despised by the world. Yes, he fears being praised and honored by the world. He is dead to it, gladly renounces all good days, health and rest, as long as he knows that he has God's grace; he does not strive to become rich. If without any seeking or wishing he becomes wealthy by God's blessing, he does not cling to

---

[271]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 181.

> it. He seeks rather to do good with it, dry the tears of the poor and promote the spread of God's kingdom. . . . He is ready to die for his faith if necessary.[272]

Summary

In this section Walther speaks out of the depths of his own experience as he tried to attain to the assurance of faith.

Reminiscent of Luther, he speaks of the Word reaching a man outwardly through the Word and inwardly through the Spirit.[273] But the Word through which the Spirit works is really two words, the prescriptive and condemning Word of the Law and the giving and saving Word of the Gospel. And both of these words are necessary to bring men to faith: the Law to unmask and to kill, the Gospel to comfort and to vivify. Hence the Law must always be preached in rapport with repentance and the Gospel with faith. Preaching today at times fails to follow up both the preaching of Law and Gospel with the appeal to repentance and faith respectively.

Walther insists that the Law must be preached first because we can only come to God as poor sinners. Now this is undeniably true when one is thinking of approaching a self-satisfied, secure sinner with the Word. However, one ought

---

[272]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 347-348.

[273]Cf. Martin Luther, Werke (Weimar: Hermann Boehlau, 1883), II, 122: "For God never suffers his Word to go forth without bringing fruit. He is with it, and himself teaches inwardly what he gives outwardly through the priest."

not to fall into the rut of treating Law and Gospel spatially in the sermon. Walther himself manifests this weakness at times.[274] In some texts, as, for example, in the story of the wicked husbandman, it is imperative first to preach the Gospel unless one wants to stand the text on its head. A basic rule is to preach Law and Gospel as the text itself suggests their use.

It is especially important to note how Walther excludes man's work from the area of faith. To be saved by faith is to be saved by grace. Faith is the way, not the work. These are basic postulates for Walther. However, one of the subtle heresies found in some preaching today is the Arminian error that preaches faith as something we do to further or to complete the program of our justification. To shout, "You must believe" can create the impression that by believing, the hearer completes his ten per cent, more or less, of the program of coming to faith. Rather than to preach faith in terms of what a person must do, one ought so to preach the Gospel so that it will work the faith it calls for.

One notices a strain of mysticism in Walther, characteristic also of Pietism, when he speaks of the Christian as being sunk in Christ as a ship that has taken water sinks into the depths of the ocean.

One of the characteristically strong accents in Walther's preaching is that faith rests on the Word. It does not rest

---

[274]Cf. Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 616ff.; Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 154.

on reason, nor does it wait for the assent of reason. Faith says with Anselm, "Credo ut intelligam", indeed, even "Credo quia absurdum." Nor does faith rest on feeling. Here Walther is aiming at the error of Pietism. But it rests on the Word. A German poem Walther frequently quotes is: Und ob mein Herz spricht lauter Nein, Dein Wort soll mir gewisser sein.

One thinks of Luther when he hears Walther speaking of faith as a living, active thing. Far from being merely intellectual assent, faith is a new power, divinely given. It makes one divinely sure of God's grace. With Pauline vigor Walther likes to talk about faith's ability to stand up before the devil and conscience and dare them to condemn him. Faith also gives one the power to resist temptation and to live the new life of love in Christ for which it was regenerated. This new life in the Spirit which is both the gift and responsibility of the Christian, is our next subject for discussion.

The Christian Life: Faith Active in Love

If one were to pose the question: Was Walther a preacher of justification or of sanctification? one could provoke a vigorous discussion. The fact is that he preached both doctrines equally persistently. He was as good an Easter preacher as he was a Pentecost preacher. The fact that he considered the doctrine of justification as the chief doctrine of the Christian religion by no means muffled the persistency with

which he urged sanctification.

The fact is that he repeatedly stresses that the goal of justification is sanctification. He points out that sanctification is God's eternal will. While it is true that God wants to take us to heaven out of grace, it remains equally true that God pardons us so that he can make us holy again. Sanctification is the goal to which God wants to lead us.[275]

> If we were to be saved, it was most necessary for Christ to come into the world to win grace and give righteousness which avails before God to us; and it is indeed necessary for every person who is to be saved to receive through faith in Christ that grace of God won for him and that righteousness which avails before God. But this is not the final goal of Christ's incarnation and our call into the kingdom of grace; it is only the means, only the way to the real goal. God did not send his Son into the world, reconcile mankind with himself, and pardon them so that mankind would be relieved of the worry that God is his enemy and that he has to expect his punishment after death. The final, the real goal of all God's work for and to man is nothing else but his sanctification.[276]

Between the doctrine of justification and sanctification there is no real but only an apparent contradiction. It is true that we do not have to earn salvation by works, but we have been saved for works. Walther puts the matter neatly: "Today we do not ask what the publican had to do in order to go down to his house justified, but how the publican afterwards lived in his home after he had returned justified."[277] Elsewhere Walther says that Jesus Christ is not only the

---

[275]Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 130-131.

[276]Ibid., pp. 125-126.

[277]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 280.

Christian's comfort but also his dress; not only his justification but also his sanctification.[278] Those who argue that since man is saved by faith alone, sanctification cannot be his destiny and perfect holiness his ultimate goal do not consider that God is and remains unchangeably a righteous and holy God.

> When God decreed to save mankind by grace through the redemption of his Son, he in no way relaxed even a little of his holiness and righteousness; he did not in the least give up his counsel according to which he had destined us to a perfect holiness and communion with him. On the contrary, God for that very reason decreed to forgive the sins of men for the sake of his Son and pardon them so that he could make them fit again in this way to be renewed to the lost divine image and thus sanctify them body and soul.[279]

Sanctification is therefore no mere appendage which either may or may not be considered a part of Christianity. It is something without which one cannot possibly be a Christian.[280] It is the will of God that we do not remain in the old life of sin, but daily more and more cleanse ourselves from the filth of the flesh and become more holy.[281] As Christian priests we are daily to crucify all evil still clinging to us and to get a new mind.[282] We are to be zealous not only in spiritual exercises, but also in the work of our

---

[278]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 6.

[279]Ibid., p. 119.

[280]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 280.

[281]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 510.

[282]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 67.

calling.[283] Taking those to task who reduce sanctification to going to church, Walther asserts that in public worship we do not serve God but God serves us. It is there that we learn how to serve God. Then he delivers this coup de grace to those who equate sanctification with going to church:

> Really, no man, no creature, not even an angel, can do something for God. God is one whom all creatures need but who himself needs no one. Everything comes from him; we can give him nothing but what he himself has first given us. . . . Since we cannot serve God himself, he has so arranged things that our neighbor needs us. . . . Come on! If you want to serve God, let us not only hear the Word but also do it in a faith which is active in love. Let us not think that we have served God when we come to church, say the Lord's Prayer, the confession, or diligently bend our knees in our closets, speak pious words, and have holy attitudes. Let us practice love toward our neighbors, "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction."[284]

Stressing the importance of sanctification in the Christian life, Walther says that there are two reasons why God will receive us into the eternal mansions. Either someone has gotten us admitted or someone asserts our claim to be admitted. "No, Christ alone has earned admission to heaven for us, but no person will be admitted except the one who has witnesses that he actually believed in Christ."[285] The witnesses, of course, are those toward whom the Christian has manifested love.

Following Luther, Walther asserts that the Christian is

---

[283] Ibid., p. 72.

[284] Ibid., pp. 248-249.

[285] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 268.

both free lord over all things and servant of all.

> As certain as it is that the Christian does not need good works for his own sake, so true it is that those who through faith have received everything from God, now also out of pure love will do to his neighbor as God has done to him. Through faith a person is free of all things and is their lord, but through love he is the servant of all things and subject to all men. If a person is dealing with God he takes everything from God without any works through faith alone; but when the Christian deals with his neighbor, through love he gives him everything which he has. . . . A person who seeks his own and does not love his neighbor is assuredly no Christian, ... A life in which one lives for himself is an imperfect life.[286]

Walther repeatedly emphasizes the truth that faith and love must be present together in the Christian life. "Whoever throws away faith does not have good works either; who throws away good works does not have faith either."[287] There are two kinds of garments with which every Christian should be adorned. The one is the complete righteousness of Christ put on by faith; the other is the dress of the new man put on through daily sanctification.[288] The world should be able to distinguish the Christian from the unbeliever as much by his piety as by his faith.[289]

> although love with its good works saves no one, yet both are necessary, in order that a man show that he really has saving faith. In their relationship faith and love are like father and son, and are to be inseparable from one another as fire and light. Whoever says that he is justified before God by faith must at

---

[286]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 438-439.

[287]Ibid., p. 523.

[288]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 326.

[289]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 109.

> the same time justify himself before men by his love, otherwise he is a liar, for faith is active in love.[290]

Where there is no love, there is no faith; where no faith, there no grace; where no grace, there is no salvation.[291] Although it is impossible to earn salvation through sanctification, a person can trifle away his salvation for the lack of it.[292] In support of this argument Walther quotes Luther:

> The Christ who died for sinners means absolutely nothing to those who will not forsake their sins after receiving forgiveness of sins and lead a new life. Christ is Christ for the reason that the Holy Ghost should make us into new men. . . . He who does not stop sinning but remains in his former ways, must have another Christ. The true Christ is not there, and if all the angels cry nothing but Christ! Christ! he must be damned with his new Christ.[293]

Not only has God called us to a life of sanctification, but he has also wonderfully equipped us for this life. The moment God worked faith in us, he also immediately sanctified us, beginning his holy work in us.[294] We are guided and ruled by the Holy Spirit, so that every victory over sin, the world, flesh, and Satan comes from the throne of grace.[295]

Therefore, after a person has been converted, he can and must cooperate with the Holy Spirit in his sanctification. The new spiritual life is capital with which the converted

---

[290]Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 105-106.

[291]Ibid., p. 110.

[292]Ibid., p. 126.

[293]Ibid.

[294]Ibid., p. 131.

[295]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 359-360.

Christian is to do business and to bring God a liberal interest. "The converted person . . . is to assist with all the divine powers given him so that he will not lose his conversion again."[296]

Walther never tires of reminding his hearers of the tremendous force for sanctification that true faith really is. Christians avoid evil and do good throughout their life without fear, only because they cannot do otherwise.[297] Although the hypocrite has to be driven by the Law, "the Christian asks about no law but does good alone out of love when in that way he can further God's honor, his own good, and the welfare of his neighbor."[298]

> Whoever from the heart believes that with the resurrection of Christ sin has lost the right to accuse him, is not only filled with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, but one does not first have to say to him, "But now you must renounce all obedience to sin; now you must also serve Christ as your rightful Lord." Before one has said this, the Christian has already begun to do it, driven by an indwelling, free urge. The living faith that he is risen with Christ to his salvation drives him now to walk with Christ in a new life.[299]

This newness of life does not consist simply in avoiding the gross sins like adultery, drunkenness, or uncleanness. Even the heathen can abstain from such things.

> But sanctification consists in this that the justified person becomes an entirely different person. He begins

---

[296]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 116.

[297]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 432.

[298]Ibid., p. 582.

[299]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 203.

> to live no longer to himself but to the Lord Jesus. He does not go to church only now and then, hearing God's Word out of curiosity, but to one who is sanctified God's Word is more important than the whole world. God's Word lies day and night on his mind. He arises with it and goes to bed with it. The concern for his soul's salvation unceasingly occupies his heart. He therefore would rather speak only of heavenly and divine things, of the one thing needful. Even if he is busy at his earthly calling, he does it with a mind directed to God. Such a one also begins to watch over his thoughts and desires. . . . He hates sin. . . . If out of weakness he heedlessly falls into sin, he does not continue in it, is ashamed of himself, confesses it, goes to God with heartfelt humility and prays for forgiveness. . . . A sanctified person views the pleasures of the world as vanities. He no longer acts like the world. . . . A sanctified Christian seeks to dedicate his whole life to his neighbor. He does not seek his own but his neighbor's prosperity. . . . Finally, what is the most noble, the sanctified Christian sees ever more of his failings rather than the good which is worked in him by God's grace. As a result he considers himself nothing in God's eyes. He humbly considers himself the least.[300]

Even though the Christian has the new man who spontaneously delights in doing the will of God, in this world his life will always be imperfect. According to our justification our freedom is perfect, but according to our sanctification it is and will remain imperfect.[301] Of perfectionism Walther has this to say: "O, what a frightful abuse of the merit of Jesus Christ and his dearly won grace."[302] Indeed, Christian

---

[300]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 281-282. Cf. Ibid., pp. 252-253; Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 8. I regard this idealistic portrayal of the Christian as one of the faults in Walther's preaching. I am quite sure that the Christian he paints does not exist. To describe a Christian in this fashion only drives weak Christians to despair. A full discussion follows. Cf. Infra, pp. 194-195.

[301]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 204.

[302]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 283.

perfection is really only recognizing that of ourselves we are imperfect and that we are perfect only in Christ.[303]

The reason why the sanctification of the Christian remains imperfect is that he still has his sinful flesh which wars against the Spirit.

> Though a Christian by God's grace has a new heart which is ever so well cultivated, his heart is not completely new, not completely spirit; it still has something, yes, much of the old, evil way. The old evil way of the heart is not dead and unfruitful, but living and powerful and unceasingly sprouts the weeds of sin.[304]

The sinful desires of the heart are like hellish taskmasters which continually incite, entice, and drive one to serve sin.[305] Not only evil thoughts but loveless words and deeds well up from the corrupt heart.[306]

In addition to the flesh, the Christian is beleaguered in his quest for holiness also by the devil, who

> is busy trying to ruin you again, trying to make you tired and faint, so that you leave Christ, yield to him again, and let yourself be brought under his scepter. . . . Satan is all around you and tries all possible keys in order to open your heart again. If he cannot open it with the key of shame and misery, he tries it with the key of false doctrine; if he does not open it, he tries it with the key of lust and good days. . . . Of a truth, being a Christian is not an idle sport, no fun or play. It is a continual struggle with flesh, world, and Satan. Whoever dreams of rest, peace, and good days as a Christian deceives himself. Satan is the enemy of all men, but he is the most bitter enemy of believers.[307]

---

[303] Ibid.

[304] Ibid., p. 101.

[305] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 196.

[306] Ibid., p. 147.

[307] Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 112-113.

Whoever, therefore, has found the truth is by no means a quiet possessor of it. Instead the kingdom of light is in mortal combat with the kingdom of darkness, because Satan and his kingdom are always taking the field against Christ and the Christian.[308]

A person who does not experience this battle really has no faith. An unbeliever experiences no trials on account of the world because he is of the world; none from the devil, because he is subject to his will; none from his flesh, because he is fleshly.[309]

Under the pressure of the temptations of the devil, world, and our own flesh we fall into sin. This occurs because our faith becomes weak. For true faith vacillates. It is like a light in the storm; at one time it is strong, at another, weak.[310] Consequently, all Christians are and remain sinners.[311]

Hence, the Christian life must be one of continuous repentance. In deep remorse the Christian must come to God acknowledging that he has made himself completely unworthy of further mercy from God and humbly crying to God for new grace and now even more earnestly watching over his own heart.[312]

---

[308]Walther, Goldkoerner, pp. 173-174.

[309]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 205-206.

[310]Ibid., p. 206.

[311]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 133.

[312]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 237.

Then, too, a Christian

> must continually use the Law of God; he must keep before him its demands and threats and by that means continuously must be poor in spirit and as a poor sinner in Christ must seek not only forgiveness but also life, strength, and power.[313]

But, above all, a Christian must strengthen his faith through the Gospel. The more one builds on God's grace, the more zealous he will be in love and in all good works.[314] First, God must give of his love; then love can enter our hearts.[315]

To keep Christians watchful and humble in their Christian life, God permits trials to come to them. "Indeed," says Walther, "there is no other way. We must follow Lazarus."[316]

New converts, radiantly happy in their new-found faith, are strongly tempted to doubt when God hides his face as though this were inconsistent with God's manner of dealing with his own.[317] But God permits trials to come not for the loss but for the salvation of the individual. If God did not permit trials to come, Christians would soon forget Christ and his grace. But in this way they remain poor in spirit.[318] In his sermon on Jeremiah 30:11, preached after the cholera

---

[313]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 594.

[314]Ibid., p. 514.

[315]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 237.

[316]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 404.

[317]Ibid., 327.

[318]Ibid., p. 329.

epidemic in St. Louis, Walther noted three gracious purposes God has in sending Christian trials: they prompt to repentance; they help to keep us from being condemned with the wicked; and they prompt us to bring forth more fruit.[319]

Summary

In spelling out the relationship between justification and sanctification Walther is a model preacher. Anyone who wants to learn the art of preaching in this difficult area can well afford to spend some time at Walther's feet.

Preaching sanctification presents two hazards, saying too much or saying too little. The Pietists said too much. They accented sanctification so strongly that, in effect, it became a necessary part of justification. Walther avoids this error with the bold statement: "We can do nothing for God." But sanctification is not optional. It is the goal of justification. The other error is that of atomizing sanctification, of setting up one's own standards of the sanctified life, of settling for less than total commitment to the sanctification of self to God. Those who do that commit the old sin of natural man, the deification of self. They forget, too, that they still live under the justice of God. Walther becomes impatient with those who confuse sanctification with going to church or with avoiding the gross sins of the heathen. The plain fact is that in conversion we put on two

---

[319]C. F. Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892), pp. 163-172.

robes, the robe of justification and the robe of sanctification. And sanctification concerns the whole of life. The Christian is free from all men, yet the servant of all.

Luther and the Lutheran Confessions shine through when Walther talks of the spontaneity with which faith works. Faith does good works because it is its nature, without regard to any law. And the Christian would need no law, except for the fact that he is flesh and spirit, simul justus et peccator. Because of the flesh he needs the law in its three uses. And he needs the Gospel, too, to renew his strength for the Christian fight. For the Christian life is, after all, a life of continuous repentance, a life under Law and Gospel, under the justice and mercy of God.

The Church

All those whom the Holy Spirit brings to a saving faith in Christ form Christ's spiritual body, the Church.

> the true Church is the whole number of those who have sought and found their salvation, not upon Sinai but upon Golgotha, who have not chosen Moses but Christ as their Mediator and leader . . . who really perceive that they are lost, poor sinners, and hungry for grace have fled from the mercy-seat revealed in Christ to all sinners.[320]

The Church, therefore, is necessarily one, made up as it is of believing Jews and Gentiles who form one fold under the one Shepherd.[321] Moreover, the Church is not a physical

---

[320]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 153.

[321]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 315.

visible kingdom but an invisible, spiritual, heavenly kingdom. "It must be a host invisible to us since no man can tell those who love Christ from those who do not."[322]

The marks of the Church are the Word and the Sacraments, the seals of the Word. This must necessarily be so because the Word is never a sterile seed.[323] The mark of the preaching of the pure Word is the infallible mark of the Church.

> Everything else which is extolled as marks of the Church, be it the outward holiness and the great works of its members, the long duration of its existence, the derivation of its beginning in an unbroken line from the apostles themselves, or whatever it is, can deceive.[324]

Hence, "wherever there is a visible congregation in which God's Word is preached in its purity, there certainly is also an invisible Church of true believers."[325]

So convinced is Walther of the purity of the doctrine taught in the Lutheran Church that he identifies her doctrine with that of the one, holy, Christian, and apostolic Church. Although all other churches direct men to their own works and piety, "Our Church alone is a true evangelical church, because it alone praises God's grace."[326]

> Whoever calls himself from his heart a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, confesses that he is not

---

[322] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 208.

[323] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 155.

[324] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 209.

[325] Ibid.

[326] Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 514-515.

> a member of a particular party in Christendom, but that he belongs to no other than the holy, universal Christian Church founded by Christ upon his Word. . . . Whatever name the church of the future may have or whatever may be its ordinances and customs, she cannot have another faith, another doctrine, and confession from the one God has given our Lutheran Zion as expressed in her Confessions because that is the old, unchanged faith of Christians, the imperishable Word of the eternal God.[327]

Therefore, as the Church of Christ is imperishable, so also is the Evangelical Lutheran Church.[328]

However, Walther opposes as un-Lutheran the teaching of some so-called Lutherans that there is no salvation outside the Lutheran Church. "As far as the heaven is from the earth, so far is our church from teaching that only those can be saved who have been called Lutherans."[329]

Although Walther maintains that in the invisible Church all are believers, he holds that in the visible church there are also hypocrites together with true Christians. The Church

---

[327] Ibid., pp. 676-677.

[328] Ibid.

[329] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 72. I feel that Walther is ambivalent on this point, because in a confirmation address he says to the children: "You have heard the true Evangelical Lutheran doctrine; you have seen that the Lutheran Church holds strictly to the Word of God in all points; if you leave this church, you will not simply with willingness and knowledge leave a man, but you will leave Christ, the Son of God, and the truth of God itself; then you will break your baptismal covenant." Walther, Goldkoerner, p. 47. Perhaps Walther feels that if one left the Lutheran Church, he would be committing a sin against conscience, a mortal sin. This view is substantiated by his article, "Zuruf an Lutheraner, welche sich anderen Kirchen angeschlossen haben," Der Lutheraner, I (March 22, 1845), 59, in which he says that when one takes a vow, he is in duty bound to keep it unless it was wrong to take it in the first place.

of Adam had its Cain; the Church of Noah, its Ham; and the Church of Abraham, its Ishmael.[330] And also today there are "enemies of Christ in the midst of Christian and orthodox congregations like ours."[331] One reason for this is the capacity of a believer to lose his faith. Walther says a number of times that most of those who have been baptized lose their faith when they grow up, and though they may continue to hear the Word, they have only a historic faith, with which none can be saved.[332] Moreover, hypocrites are found in every Christian congregation.

> Hypocrites even today still cling to every Christian congregation; some of these we cannot always recognize; others we cannot put away in the hope of their conversion.[333]

The Church, therefore, is a little flock.[334] It was small at

---

[330]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 257.

[331]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 231.

[332]Ibid., pp. 617-618. Cf. Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 123. 216.

[333]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 297. This is an extremely important assertion of Walther's because it reveals quite clearly the attitude Walther takes toward his own congregation. Only on the basis of the statement can one understand why he applies his sermons quite consistently to the unbelievers as well as to the believers in his audience. This matter is treated more fully, Infra, pp. 192-194. I feel that his statement is too broad. I would prefer to say that there are certainly hypocrites in every congregation where Law and Gospel are not preached properly and where church discipline is neglected. But I do not feel that there is warrant for categorically assuming that there are hypocrites in every congregation.

[334]Ibid., p. 296.

Noah's time, at Elijah's time, and at Christ's time. A person can easily be deceived, therefore, as he looks out upon a large congregation of hearers if he does not remember that, after all, Christ's flock is small.[335]

On the basis of this argument, Walther condemns those who like the Donatists, the Zwickau prophets, and the Anabaptists insist that the visible church must be absolutely pure if it wants to be Christ's church. The history of the church confirms that they are wrong in insisting that every member of the church must be truly devout, born again, pious and holy.

> if the church had the pure doctrine, then it does not become a false church when sins and offenses appear in it. If a church is really Christ's church, nothing else is possible but that many sins and offenses appear . . . . wherever the devil is in control there he is quiet; but wherever his authority is taken away by the Word and the Sacrament, there he storms and rages with all the might of the prince of darkness. In short, wherever Christ sows the good seed, there Satan also sows tares.[336]

Without endeavoring here to discuss fully everything that Walther has to say about the rights and privileges of the Christian congregation, it is significant to note in passing Walther's repeated emphasis of the right and the duty of the Christian congregation to judge doctrine. He calls this right "the inalienable and inviolable right which the congregation as a whole and every member individually has."[337]

---

[335] Ibid., p. 452.

[336] Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 85-86.

[337] Ibid., p. 259.

> The hearers just as much as the teachers must some day give an account of that which they believed and with which they dealt. Therefore the hearers should and must know of themselves to distinguish whether the true Word is being taught them and whether they are being led in the green pasture and on the right way to salvation or not.[338]

Summary of Doctrinal Accents

It is interesting to observe how closely Walther's theological accents hover about the doctrines which he considered the three parts of the way of salvation: repentance, faith, and regeneration.[339] As a corollary of these three accents, and viewed this time from the perspective of God, Walther's core idea is the monergism of grace in God's conquest of mankind in redemption and conversion. This is entirely God's work, so that neither the works before faith nor after faith enter into the picture. From a third point of view, Walther's doctrinal preaching lies within the tension of Law and Gospel. Through the Law God brings to repentance; through the Gospel he brings to faith; through Law and Gospel He guides the Christian in a life of continuous repentance.

From first to last, therefore, Walther's preaching is decidedly soteriological. This is evident as much from what

---

[338]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 31-32. Cf. Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 235. For a full discussion of Walther's position on the duties and responsibilities of the Christian congregation see C. F. W. Walther, Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt, (vierte Auflage; Zwickau: Verlag des Schriftenvereins der sep. evang-luth. Gemeinden in Sachsen, 1894).

[339]Walther, Pastorale, p. 94. Supra, p. 56.

Walther does not accent as from what he emphasizes. For example, one does not find in Walther's preaching a strong eschatological note as one does, for example, in the post World War II German sermons.[340] Nor does one find that Walther takes his cue for his sermons from crises of the age as does Harry Emerson Fosdick.[341]

A third observation is that for the most part Walther does not preach doctrine isolated from the purpose of his sermon, whether to warn against false doctrine, to correct an ungodly life, to encourage to a godly life, or to comfort.

It is to these purposes of the sermon that we now turn our attention.

---

[340]Cf. Dietrich Bonnhoefer's sermons.

[341]Cf. Harry Emerson Fosdick, A Great Time to be Alive (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944). Everyone knows Walther's famous Brandpredigt, Brosamen, pp. 338-346, because it is such a rare exception to Walther's practice.

CHAPTER VI

THE TIMELINESS OF WALTHER'S PREACHING

Whether or not one judges Walther's sermons to be timely depends upon one's definition of that idea. If, for example, one means by timely sermons which address themselves specifically to current social and economic and political issues, he will be inclined to say that Walther was lacking in this area.

However, if one views timeliness from Walther's perspective, he will find his sermons timely, indeed. For Walther God is the great contemporary who addresses himself to man in every age to win him as his own and to keep him in this faith until his end. In all of his sermons Walther has the timeless God addressing himself to man, who because of sin is essentially the same from age to age and who therefore today has the same basic needs which man had yesterday. His task is to confront man in his sin with God in his justice and mercy for the purpose of rescuing man from himself for the life of fellowship with God now and eternally. In the context of seeking to effect an encounter between the "I" of God and the "thou" of man, Walther's preaching is exceedingly timely.

This is not to say that Walther was totally oblivious to the world in which his people lived. But he addressed himself to social, political, and economic questions only in

the measure in which these posed a threat to the spiritual life of his members. But when he did find forces in the world opposing the Christian faith and way of life, he was not hesitant to speak.

Hence we find that in some of his sermons he engages in polemics, although this accent is never permitted to dominate his sermons. Walther justifies his own polemics thus:

> It is therefore in no sense enough that a pastor leads his flock entrusted to him and pastures them with the pure doctrine; if a preacher wants the name of a good shepherd, he must also fight against false teachers faithfully and bravely, as against wolves who do not spare the flock.[1]

In his sermon on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Missouri Synod Walther summarizes the forces against which his polemics is directed.

> We have had to battle with the unbelief and the mockery of our day, which under the cry of freedom and progress seeks utterly to destroy religion and morals, Church and State, all divine and human ordinances. We have had to battle with the spirit of religious unionism, which is pervading all Christendom like a pest, throttling at its very inception all love for pure truth. We have had to battle with the fanaticism of enthusiastic sects. We have had to battle with the impertinent assumptions of an anti-Christian papacy, which is growing ever bolder and bolder. We have battled with a new-type Lutheranism, which has been corrupted by rationalistic, unionistic, sectarian, and Romanizing teachings, principles, laws, and practices. Yes, we have had to contend with false spirits in our own midst.[2]

---

[1]C. F. W. Walther, Goldkoerner (Zwickau: Druck und Verlag von Johannes Heermann, 1901), p. 69. It is significant that Walther entitled the theological journal which he introduced to the Church in 1855 Lehre und Wehre, teach and protect.

[2]C. F. W. Walther, Lutherische Brosamen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1897), p. 561. Hereafter this work is referred to as Brosamen.

One of the implacable foes of Lutheranism in Walther's day was Rationalism. The German immigrants who came to America in the forties were largely Rationalists. Consequently, Maurer reports that the colonies of Germans in Missouri were places where

> coarse ridicule was encouraged; where sacred rites were rudely satirized; where a dog could be baptized, or a beer keg dragged into the pulpit; where self-styled liberals deliberately planned the destruction of churches in order to force out the pastors currently serving them, so that these pastors would be less objectionable to those engineering the change; and where violence against the reverent was not unknown.[3]

Books for Rationalists were regularly advertised in the German newspaper, Anzeiger Des Westens.[4] A certain Heinrich Koch, editor of the Antipfaff, was president and one of the prime movers in the German Rationalistic Society, organized in 1846.[5]

Walther is referring to the Rationalists when he says that

> whole armies of baptized scoffers and slanderers have arisen; they seek to overthrow all religion under the guise of progress and enlightenment, and condemn all holy, mysterious doctrines and institutions of Christ as superstition. They make game of the Bible, God,

---

[3]Maurer, "Studies in the Sociology of Religion," American Journal of Sociology, XXX, 544-545, quoted in Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 315.

[4]Anzeiger Des Westens, December 8, 1841, p. 3. This newspaper is on file in the public library of St. Louis.

[5]Forster, op. cit., p. 265, refers to Anzeiger des Westens, December 2, 1845 and February 6, 1846, and to the St. Louis Daily New Era, March 19, 1846.

> Christ, heaven and hell, and merely laugh at and ridicule a belief in the last day.[6]

Scornfully he says,

> their darkness they call light; their zeal against the bonds of morality and honesty they call a fight for freedom; and their denial of the Almighty they dress up with the fine sounding name of the Enlightenment.[7]

Nor does Walther ignore the Socialists who already then were sowing their seeds of atheism and the violent overthrow of the government. In his sermon on 1 Peter 2:11-20 he preaches against the reading of atheistic literature which proclaims the overthrow of all divine and human laws. Hinting at the doctrine of Communism, he says: "To exerminate all kings and privileged groups and to grant democratic freedom to all people has been called the goal toward which the world is moving."[8]

---

[6]C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille (neunte Auflage; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1870), p. 10. Hereafter this work is referred to as Evangelien Postille.

[7]C. F. W. Walther, Licht des Lebens, edited by C. J. Otto Hanser (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905), p. 331.

[8]C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille (zweite Auflage; St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1882), p. 232. This work is hereafter referred to as Epistel Postille. In a letter to O. Fuerbringer, February 17, 1847, Walther mentions that the Communist movement was rather strong. Briefe von C. F. W. Walther, edited by L. Fuerbringer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1915), I, 37. Hereafter this work is referred to as Briefe. To combat the evil of Communism Walther held four evening lectures in which he outlined especially for his working men in the congregation the anti-Christian tenets of Communism. These lectures were later published under the title Communismus und Socialismus (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio, und anderen Staaten, 1878).

Another target of Walther's polemic was the enthusiastic sects. Ever since 1800 revival meetings which lasted four or five days swept the country. At these meetings there were not only much weeping and shouting, but it was common for people to fall down as though dead and to lie there for some time.[9] The employment of these Holy Roller tactics was "common not only among the smaller nondescript sects, but also among the larger church bodies, such as the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians."[10] Walther himself describes the teaching of the enthusiasts on the rebirth thus:

> They say that only he is reborn who can tell the exact time of his rebirth. They say that when the rebirth has occurred, a sweet, heavenly peace fills the heart. They say that true conversion occurs only if the sinner is overwhelmed with boundless joy so that he shouts aloud with joy, hops and jumps, and confesses, "Now I am saved."[11]

But he charges that they can give the miserable no comfort, but only plunge them deeper into sadness when they teach that "when their heart damns them, God damns them all the more. That is a shameful murder of souls and a twisting of the Gospel."[12] Therefore, Walther admonishes his congregation:

> Though enthusiasts may rely on what they do and suffer and experience, on their prayers, on their strugglings and wrestlings, on their sea of self-denial, on their

---

[9]F. R. Webber, A History of Preaching in Britain and America (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1952), III, 181.

[10]Britton, "Pioneer Life in Southwest Missouri," Missouri Historical Review, XVI, 282, quoted in Forster, op. cit., p. 310.

[11]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 211.

[12]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 226.

> feelings, on their repentance and sanctification, we will rely on what God has done for us and what he gives us in his Word and the Holy Sacraments.[13]

Walther's sermons reflect polemics against a variety of Reformed perversions: self-appointed ministers who without a call sneak about the land from house to house;[14] the doctrine that the Church is an institution of morality in which Christ is a law-giver;[15] the legalistic view of the Sabbath;[16] and the latitudinarianism of the Evangelical Church. Against the latter view he says:

> A church that wants to make peace by yielding part of the truth and declaring that false doctrine is just as permissible in the church as the true doctrine, according to God's Word such a church is just a house which consists of white-washed walls which are neither built of stone nor erected upon a firm foundation; any wind can blow it down; any rain can wash it away.[17]

He takes a dim view of Protestantism, charging that it has lost the Gospel in its churches and schools because it denies

---

[13]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 169. Der Lutheraner bristles with articles directed against the Methodists. From March through June of 1846 a series of articles against the Methodists appeared under the title, "Die Heilige Absolution gerettet gegen die Laesterungen der Methodisten," Der Lutheraner, II (March 21, 1846), 59f.; (April 4, 1846), 62f.; (May 2, 1846), 71f.; (May 16, 1846), 73f.; (June 13, 1846), 82f.; (June 27, 1846), 85-88. G. A. Schieferdecker wrote an article entitled "Falsche Lehre der Methodisten von der Rechtfertigung," Der Lutheraner, II (November 15, 1845), 23-24, and (November 29, 1845), 25-26. Sihler wrote a pamphlet against the Methodists which was translated into English, Norwegian, and Swedish and of which 12,000 copies were sold. Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 164.

[14]Walther, Goldkerner, p. 64.

[15]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 310.

[16]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 306.

[17]Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 76-77.

the deity of Christ and the atonement.[18]

Another thrust of Walther's polemics is against Rome. Walther feared the power of Rome. In a letter to Marbach, speaking of the influence of the Jesuits in America, he said: "I fear that in twenty years the United States will be in the hands of the Jesuits and political and religious freedom will be at an end."[19] Consequently, with the zeal of Luther he warns against the pretensions of Rome. The papal church, he declares is not Christ's church because the pope, falsely called Christ's vicar, identifies the church with a worldly kingdom consisting of all sorts of worldly ordinances.[20] Because the pope teaches that no one can be sure of his salvation and denies justification by faith, "if there were no further testimony that the pope is the Antichrist and that his church is the anti-Christian kingdom, that alone would be enough."[21] In a Reformation sermon he adds:

> let us never forget that even the most perverse sects recognize that God's Word is the judge. Only the infamous pope . . . does not want to be regulated by the written Word. . . . While the sects are heterodox, the papacy is anti-Christian. . . . The Church will never lose this enemy. He is her arch-enemy. . . . It should be said of us today and at all times: "Christ's friend and the Antichrist's foe."[22]

---

[18]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 660-661.

[19]Walther, Briefe, I, 91.

[20]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 252.

[21]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 647-648.

[22]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 390.

Walther's polemic is directed also against secret societies. He had reason to denounce them because by 1842 there were six Masonic lodges in St. Louis. The Odd Fellows had seven lodges in the city, one a special "Germania" lodge for the Germans.[23] He charges the lodges with imposing a tax for the support of their members only on condition that the individual contributing receive the amount or a greater amount than he has contributed. "They are proud," he says, "to be members of such a noble organization, such a beautiful fraternity of brotherly love."[24] The love they practice is really no love at all.

Finally, Walther scores false Lutherans who go under the name of Lutheran and sing Luther's songs but who regard his doctrine as dangerous, false doctrine, and enthusiasm. Many of these are those who cry, "Union, oneness, love, peace."[25]

---

[23]Forster, op. cit., pp. 310-311.

[24]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 88.

[25]Walther, Goldkoerner, p. 89. A person can understand Walther's polemic against fellow Lutherans only against the background of conditions in the Lutheran Church in America at that time. Carl S. Mundinger, op. cit., p. 190, reports that there were many congregations which were made up of Lutherans and Reformed. Unionism, therefore, was practiced openly. Furthermore, Lewis W. Spitz, "Walther's Contribution to Lutheranism," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (October, 1961), 587-588, adds the following pertinent information: Frederick Henry Quitman wrote his Evangelical Catechism or a Short Exposition of the Principal Doctrines and Precepts of the Christian Religion (Hudson: William E. Normans, 1814), in which he denied the inspiration of the Scriptures and the validity of the Apostles' Creed and the chief Lutheran Confessions. S. S. Schmucker, in his Definite Platform. Doctrinal and Disciplinarian, for Evangelical Lutheran District Synods; Constructed in Accordance with the Principles of the General

The restrained character of Walther's polemics together with his own nobility of person is reflected in the attacks which he did not publicly answer. In St. Louis there was a group called the Native American Party who were strongly anti-alien. They contended that the American was in every way superior to a foreigner and used the public press to vilify the Germans.[26] Walther rises above these attacks.

Moreover, Walther himself was attacked in the daily press. Ferdinand Sproede, a hot-headed and pugnacious baker, wrote a document in which "he gave the preachers a terrific shellacking and unmercifully condemned their call and office."[27] This man had attacked Walther already in Perry County; following him to St. Louis, he continued to vilify him in the pages of the Anzeiger des Westens.[28] Steffens reports that Sproede

> called Walther a miserable Pietist, a deceiver, and a wolf, who had no knowledge of true Lutheranism, which they [i.e., Sproede and his fellow followers] claimed as their exclusive possession; accused him, the most

---

Synod (Philadelphia: Miller and Burlock, 1846), p. 2, says that he omitted "those several aspects of doctrine . . . which have long since been regarded by the great mass of our churches as unscriptural, and as remnants of Romish error." Although this document was never adopted, it does represent "a determined effort to bring Lutheranism into accord with Calvinism." Spitz, op. cit., p. 588.

[26]Forster, op. cit., p. 272, refers to the St. Louis Daily American, March 16, 1847.

[27]Mundinger, op. cit., p. 103.

[28]Mundinger, loc. cit., says that his first contribution is in Anzeiger des Westens, November 20, 1842.

> ardent of men, of hierarchical aims, insisted that the congregation depose him, questioned its right to exist as a congregation, urged its prompt dissolution, etc.[29]

Another of Walther's adversaries was Koch, who founded the Antipfaff, an anti-clerical newspaper in which he made scurrilous attacks on Walther.[30] Instead of using his pulpit to fulminate against Koch, Walther answered his charges in Der Lutheraner, telling Koch to read the Catechism and the Augsburg Confession to learn our views.[31] However, Walther did take occasion to rebuke the public press in general in his sermon delivered after the great St. Louis fire of 1849. Speaking of the indifference of the inhabitants of St. Louis to previous visitations of God, Walther says:

> But most of the inhabitants of our city reacted to God's punishments and judgments only with derision, and in unparalleled madness those who want to be the leaders of the people, the editors of our daily papers, unrebuked have ridiculed it that there are still people in our city who still believe in a God and who therefore humble themselves under his almighty hand and who together and humbly plead for his mercy.[32]

Walther regards as one of the causes of the fire the ridicule and blasphemy of God's Word and everything holy carried on by

---

[29]D. H. Steffens, Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917), p. 181.

[30]Mundinger, op. cit., p. 177. So severe were these attacks upon Walther and the Germans that Trinity Church decided to hold the cornerstone laying for their new church in the basement of Christ Church Cathedral because of fear of disturbance on the part of the enemies. Cf. Protokolbuch der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinde Ungeaenderter Augsburgischer Confession zu St. Louis, May 30, 1842, Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri.

[31]Der Lutheraner, I (October 5, 1844), 12.

[32]Walther, Brosamen, p. 339.

the writers of newspapers and their readers, both high and low, rich and poor.[33] In another sermon he says:

> The Bible of most is the newspaper. The more godless, the more hostile to church and the more seditious the content is, the more readers it has.[34]

Our subject, the timeliness of Walther's preaching, gives us occasion also to ask to what degree Walther expresses himself on current political, economic, and social problems.

Chief among the problems in Walther's day doubtless was slavery which led to the Civil War, 1861-1865. Between 1840 and 1847 there were labor strikes in St. Louis.[35] Financial panics of 1857 and 1873 caused financial ruin to thousands.[36] The city of St. Louis was one of the most unhealthful in the world,[37] with 25% of the children dying in their first year and 40% by their fifth year.[38]

Although Henry Ward Beecher, Horace Bushnell, Walter Rauschenbush, and others thundered against social evils, and although the Baptists and the Presbyterians split over the slavery issue,[39] Walther and the Lutherans were remarkably silent.

---

[33] Ibid., p. 343.

[34] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 306.

[35] Forster, op. cit., p. 349.

[36] Webber, op. cit., pp. 321ff.

[37] Martin Guenther, Dr. C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1890), p. 34.

[38] Forster, op. cit., p. 332.

[39] Webber, op. cit., pp. 321ff.

Walther himself on a number of occasions explains his position with respect to social, political, and economic problems. His first words in his sermon after the St. Louis fire are:

> You know that it is generally my custom not to leave holy places to speak to you about current happenings. A preacher of the Gospel should not express his opinions concerning these things in order in this way to entertain his hearers, but should interpret the Word of the Lord. But we are now living in a time in which it is impossible for a pastor to avoid speaking of current happenings.[40]

Again, in a Fourth of July address to a gathering of young people, Walther made his position clear. He said that if they expected him to talk about the great deeds of men in order to inflame them with a desire to be good citizens, they were mistaken. He could not do that because, first of all, he was a Christian who must give all glory to God for our national achievements. Then he adds this significant statement:

> You know, I am a theologian, a preacher of religion, a servant of the Church. If therefore I today talk about this form of government, I shall naturally do it in its relationship to religion, to Christianity, to the Church, which before everything else holds my attention and of which my call and my heart compel me to speak.[41]

Perhaps his clearest statement is in Communismus und Socialismus:

---

[40] Walther, Brosamen, p. 338.

[41] Ibid., pp. 362-363.

> In truth, politics is not the business of us theologians; also with respect to questions of economics in human society it is not our business to speak nor have we any desire to do so. A person needs only read our church papers to learn in a short time that we do not become involved in these things. It is not our office and calling. However, when those who are admittedly political leaders involve religion in their activity, then we cannot keep silent because then we would become traitors to the truth.[42]

Guided by this principle, Walther makes only rare references to the occurrences in the physical environment of his people. Those which he does make are, therefore, all the more significant.

First, one is impressed with Walther's love for America. How affectionately he refers to her as "our new fatherland." In a letter to his wife, written while he was on a European trip, Walther clearly indicates that he wants to live and die in America.[43] That which impressed him most about America was its religious liberty. He called this "the brightest shining star in the banner of our new fatherland."[44] In a penitential sermon preached on a national day of repentance and prayer, Walther extols the blessings which the Lutherans enjoy in America as compared with the oppression of Germany:

---

[42]Walther, Communismus und Socialismus, p. 7. In his presidential address to the Synod in 1863, Walther declared that religion and politics must not be mixed. When people come together as Christians, they have nothing to do with the world. Elfter Synodal-Bericht der allgemeinen Deutschen Evang.-Luth. Synod von Missouri, Ohio, u.a. Staaten vom Jahre 1863 (St. Louis: Synodaldruckerei von Aug. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1864), p. 8.

[43]Walther, Briefe, I, 81.

[44]Walther, Brosamen, p. 364.

> Here we live in a nation in which the Church enjoys a freedom such as has existed nowhere since the founding of the Church and which is to be found almost nowhere else in the present world. Our government, rather than allowing itself any interference in the sacred rights of the Church, does nothing except to protect mightily the rights of the Church. Therefore we have full authority to conduct our affairs according to the Word of God and according to the example of the Church in its most flourishing days and to give our churches the character of true Christian and apostolic churches. In undisturbed peace we here can build and without the least hindrance from the outside can lay the best foundation for the future.
>
> If we cast a glance upon our old German fatherland, how different we find things there. There the Church is bound with chains. False teachers in church and school are foisted upon most of the congregations and the hands of the few pious servants of the Church are bound as are those of their congregations. The books which must be used in church and school are filled with the poison of false doctrine. A Christian father rarely experiences it that the enemy of Christ whom he has as his curate baptizes his child without blasphemy. Whoever appeals to his Christian liberty is considered a rebel.[45]

Walther brings a Fourth of July address to this stirring conclusion:

> Blessed be this land in which we enjoy this freedom! And as this country safeguards religious freedom, so religion brings her heavenly blessings . . . . let us also as citizens of this country zealously work for her, and courageously fight, and, if necessary, gladly shed our blood for her that this country may not only remain a land of freedom, but, above all, that it may keep her golden crown of freedom, namely, her religious freedom, and so be and remain a country of freedom for all those of all nations of the earth who are persecuted for religion's sake. . . . Heil Dir, America! Heil!! Heil!!![46]

It is doubtful that America had a more loyal subject in the

---

[45] C. F. W. Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, edited by H. Sieck (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892), pp. 151-152. Cf. Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 179.

[46] Walther, Brosamen, p. 369.

nineteenth century than C. F. W. Walther.[47]

But Walther views the blessings of religious liberty together with all the other blessings which the Saxons and all other Americans enjoyed as free gifts of God. In his sermon on Jeremiah 18:1-11 he says:

> There is no doubt about it: neither the cleverness or might of men called our nation into being, but the Lord; neither the cleverness or might of men has brought together men of all languages, peoples, lands, and religions and welded them into one great, free, mighty people, but the Lord; neither human ingenuity or power has preserved our fatherland, established its pillars, bound together its people and states, and fashioned its fortune, but the Lord. In his hand our fatherland was and is, as the vessel is in the hand of the potter.[48]

The first to defend the boon of religious freedom, Walther was also the first to denounce those who equated liberty with license. He says:

> The great mass suppose that they are free from obedience to God, free from religion, free from church and worship, free from obedience to all those in authority, free from all discipline. The freedom they seek is nothing else except shamelessness, the most disgraceful servitude to their passions, the slavery of sin.[49]

> Here under the guise of freedom of religion and conscience such horrible blasphemies are uttered against God, his Word, and everything holy, on all streets, in all public places, and even spread in the eagerly read dailies, as I dare say happens in no other country of the world. Under the cloak of freedom, all sins and

---

[47]Mundinger, op. cit., p. 207, says that Walther became an American citizen, March 8, 1847, the notice being carried in Die Deutsche Tribune, March 10, 1847. Walther could have received his citizenship three years earlier.

[48]Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, p. 161.

[49]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 339.

shame are committed in broad daylight.[50]

Walther complained that not one-half of the inhabitants of St. Louis were in church on Sunday. "The churches of most," he says, "are the saloons, shows, dance halls, and lodges of secret, unchristian societies."[51] What particularly disturbed Walther was the fact that so many of the immigrants either fell from their faith entirely and joined the mockers or else joined the sects.[52]

We now proceed to discuss Walther's attitude toward the government and politics. In his sermon on 1 Peter 2:11-20, devoted entirely to the subject of civil government, Walther points out that the whole creation is not a disconnected mass of things and beings, but an orderly kingdom divided into countless provinces. Rulers take the place of the Lord, the king of kings. If the government does not order you to sin, then obedience is due it, even if it acts unjustly.[53] According to Scripture the government is to be guardian of both tables of the Law. "They should, therefore, watch that subjects not only give the neighbor his due according to the second table of the Law, but also God, according to the first

---

[50] Ibid., p. 59. In Der Lutheraner, VIII (February 17, 1852), 97, he writes about "the fraud concerning liberty which is raging in our country." On January 8, 1860 he wrote to A. C. Preus of "freedom-drunk America." Walther, Briefe, I, 127.

[51] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 306.

[52] Walther, Brosamen, p. 209.

[53] Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 232ff.

table."[54] Nevertheless, church and state should remain separate in this sense that the state does not ask its citizens how they hope to be saved, but only that the state watches that no one prohibits another from worshipping God according to the dictates of his conscience.[55]

But as for partisan politics itself, Walther did not enter into the matter.[56] That Walther did not preach politics is attested also by a defense of Walther published by members of Trinity when Heinrich Koch charged in Antipfaff that members of Trinity voted for Clay and Frelingshuysen at the command of Walther. The article reads:

> We can assure you with absolute confidence that Pastor Walther never has made a political public address and that in private conversation he has not declared himself for or against any party. He believes that such political activity is not in keeping with his ministerial office. We therefore declare Heinrich Koch, the editor of Antipfaff an abominable liar and defamer so long as he does not mention by name the men of whom he says that Pastor Walther commanded them to vote as

---

[54]Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, p. 156.

[55]Walther, Brosamen, p. 364. It is interesting that in a letter to J. C. W. Lindemann, president of Synod's college for the training of teachers, Walther spoke against accepting support from the state for church schools. Walther, Briefe, II, 199-200. In a letter to J. C. W. Lindemann Walther upholds the right of the government to wage war and the duty of the Christian to heed the call to arms. Walther, Ibid., I, 162.

[56]J. L. Gruber, Erinnerungen an Professor C. F. W. Walther und seine Zeit (Burlington: Lutheran Literary Board, n.d.), p. 118, says that since the Westliche Post was under the ban of the church because of its anti-church attitude, Walther read and probably got his views from the Democratic Anzeiger des Westens. In Der Lutheraner, XVII (December 11, 1860), 68, Walther calls political papers "tools of Satan."

they did.[57]

But Walther was not as politically naive as it might appear. In a penitential sermon he says:

> Persons in the government are likewise guilty of great corruption. They get their offices by graft and bribery and once in office, they use their powers to plunder the citizens' pocketbook. They turn halls of justice into halls of injustice.[58]

On the right or wrong of slavery, I can find nothing in Walther's sermons. However, we know what his stand was from a letter to Pastor A. C. Preus, January 8, 1860:

> Insofar as slavery was lawfully permitted in America, insofar American slavery is not sinful. However, everything that proceeded from it contrary to God's law was just as sinful, godless, accursed, and damned as in the slavery at Rome in Paul's day. Everything, therefore, that the apostle does not condemn about Roman slavery, we cannot condemn either, if we want to be Christians. But whatever that is sinful attaches to American slavery, we cannot excuse, palliate, or justify. . . . This offense we must damn and curse. This (not slavery itself) has cried to heaven.[59]

Walther is also strangely silent on the Civil War, except to refer to the attendant misery it brought, as, for example,

---

[57]Mundinger, op. cit., p. 208, says that this article appeared in Anzeiger des Westens, November 26, 1844.

[58]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 402.

[59]Walther, Briefe, I, 127. In a letter to Rev. Lindemann, April 27, 1861, Walther wrote of his being in possible danger because he did not agree with the Abolitionist-Republican Party. Ibid., I, 164. The minutes of March 20, 1861, in Protokolbuch der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinde Ungeaenderter Augsburgischer Confession zu St. Louis, Mo. Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri, indicate that Walther discussed the slavery question with his congregation, pointing out that Abraham had slaves and that Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon. Moreover, the Tenth Commandment includes the master-servant relationship. Not all members agreed with Walther. Some argued that slavery violated brotherly love. Walther's statement to the clergy is in "Vorwort," Lehre und Wehre, IX (February, 1863), 33-46.

in a sermon preached in 1863 in which he talks about the "rivers of blood flowing on battlefields, the misery of the thousands of wounded and humiliated, the grief and tears of widows and orphans."[60]

An economic problem which Walther mentions in his sermons is the taking of interest. He usually has it included in a list of sins which he condemns. The reason he condemns it is that while today a person generally borrows in the hope of personal gain through borrowing, in those days no one stood a chance of gaining anything from borrowing because of his poverty. Walther indicates that he considers it as much a duty of Christians to lend to those who need it as to give to the poor; and to require interest for such lending of money is sinful. He goes so far as to call it theft.[61]

Two events which affected all of St. Louis and Trinity congregation with it were the cholera epidemic and the great fire of 1849. In a funeral sermon for a young girl who was its victim, Walther describes how only a few evenings before she was present in the bloom of youth as he addressed the young people's group.[62] In his New Year's sermon of 1850, Walther also describes the suddenness with which death struck:

---

[60]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 4.

[61]Walther, Briefe, II, 30. In this letter to J. A. Ottesen, April 11, 1866, he discusses this matter at length. Gruber, op. cit., p. 127, reports that between January 25 and February 12, 1864, seven meetings were held in Trinity Church to discuss this matter.

[62]Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, p. 562.

> Today we would greet a friend and brother who was a picture of health; the next we would follow his coffin to God's acre. No matter where we went, we heard the cry of pain, and the groans and death rattle of those wrestling with death. Soon the entire city was a huge mortuary and our congregation had become one large sorrowing family.[63]

In a number of sermons Walther comforts his congregation in the face of the epidemic. In his New Year's Day sermon of 1850 he tells his members that they could still praise God because those who had died were in the church triumphant.[64] In a sermon on Luke 18:9-14 Walther says that the doctrine of justification is the best medicine against the fear of the epidemic.[65] In a funeral sermon preached during the epidemic, he speaks of the epidemic as a judgment of God. No one should think himself secure against death; but in his insecurity he should not despair but flee to Jesus.[66]

In the midst of the cholera epidemic, one of the worst fires in the history of our nation broke out, wiping out the entire business district and consuming twenty-seven river steamers and six hundred and forty buildings. In his famous Brandpredigt Walther himself describes the tragedy:

A great and fearful calamity befell our city on the

---

[63]Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 47ff. In a letter to Sihler, May 10, 1849, Walther, Briefe, I, 59, says that the day before he buried a sixteen year old girl, who had been ill with cholera for only fourteen hours.

[64]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 51.

[65]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 279.

[66]Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, pp. 562ff.

> very day on which God's Word had been publicly derided. Hardly had the sound of the church bells on last Ascension Day and prayers of Christians died away when the clanging of the fire bells rang through the avenues and streets of our city. The night suddenly became as bright as day. In only a few hours hungry flames had destroyed most of the ships in our harbor and turned to ashes a number of the richest and busiest streets of our city. Thousands in a short time lost their homes and all their earthly possessions, some of them their lives either in the water or in the flames or by being crushed and killed under the crumbling buildings. The power of the devastating element mocked at all human strength that tried to extinguish it and every human device that attempted to set a limit to its spread.
>
> When at last the night of terror ended and the sun of a new day lighted our fortunate city, possessions worth millions had become the food of the devouring flames; and who could count the tears and sighs pressed out by the calamity? Ah, a number of our beloved members belong to those unfortunates who gaze amid tears upon the ash-heaps into which their dwellings and all their possessions have been transformed.[67]

In this powerful sermon Walther tells his people:

> God did that. . . . However, my beloved, we must not only say, "God did that," but must also add, "The sins of the whole city and also our sins did that."[68]

Then Walther points out the three-fold purpose God had in mind in permitting the fire to happen: (1) to punish sin; (2) to awaken the unbeliever from his sin; (3) to chastize the Christian so that his faith may be purified, his poverty of spirit deeper, his prayer more fervent, and his hope in God stronger.[69]

Looking back over the material presented in this chap-

---

[67] Walther, Brosamen, p. 339.

[68] Ibid., p. 342.

[69] Ibid., pp. 344ff.

ter, a person can draw a number of significant conclusions: first, Walther is very definitely a Jenseitstheolog, a preacher who has his eye on eternity and whose ultimate concern in preaching is so to present the Word that pilgrims in time will find the rest of heaven.[70] Secondly, Walther shows himself to be an uncompromising theologian. Every error in doctrine is an offense against God's Word. For that reason Walther feels compelled to warn against it. Thirdly, Walther has the good sense to know when to be quiet. He is content to let indifferent matters be indifferent. Fourth, Walther proclaims a God who is a God in history, who is responsible also for our physical blessings and who continues to speak to Christian and unbeliever alike through his judgments.

---

[70] In a letter to his daughter, Magdalene, January 9, 1870, Walther accents this truth when he says: "Life on this earth only has this worth that in it we are prepared for salvation." Walther, Briefe, II, 172.

CHAPTER VII

THE USE OF THE WORD FOR CORRECTING AN UNGODLY LIFE

One of the very strong accents in Walther's preaching is his rebuking of prevailing sins. As one reads a number of his sermons at one sitting, he finds that Walther spends almost as much time denouncing a false faith as he does pleading for a true faith. When he is rebuking sin, he is in dead earnest; he preaches the Law as though there were no Gospel and pictures God in the awesomeness of his justice and righteousness. His language is vigorous, blunt, and unsparing.

Without a doubt, the reason for Walther's stern rebuke of sin in any form is that he takes the admonition of Ezekiel utterly seriously.[1] In one of his sermons Walther explains the reason for his censure of the prevailing sins of the congregation:

> Don't wonder about it, my hearers, if I preach to you not only the sweet gospel, but also the deadly and frightful law. Don't wonder about it that I always rebuke . . . again and again all reigning sins among us and deny all those the grace of God and heaven and salvation who want to remain in only one sin. If I did not want to do that, I would betray your souls and would at length receive the reward of hypocrites.[2]

His rebukes seem to fall into a number of categories. First, he scores those sins which his members have as members

---

[1] Ezekiel 33:8.

[2] C. F. W. Walther, Licht des Lebens, edited by C. J. Otto Hanser (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905), pp. 39-40.

of the church: the neglect of the study of the Word, the failure to read church periodicals, to attend church, particularly services held during the week, the neglect of caring for the needy, of mission work, of brotherly admonition,[3] and the neglect of family devotions.[4] Secondly, Walther repeatedly rebukes the sins of money madness, greed, usury,[5] cheating on taxes and customs, and working without concern for the interests of the employer.[6]

> most so-called Christians . . . want to be rich, rich. . . . They secretly practice the most shameful usury and pretend to their needy brethren that they are poor. . . . A secure, carefree life, that is the heaven which they seek.[7]

Here is how Walther talks to fathers who deny their children a Christian education so that they can go out to earn a few rusty dollars:

> Some day God will demand the souls and blood of our children of us and say: "Where are my children I have given you . . . ? And what should one say of such

---

[3]C. F. W. Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, edited by H. Sieck (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892), pp. 172ff.

[4]Ibid., p. 130.

[5]Ibid., pp. 142ff. Cf. C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille (zweite Auflage; St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1882), pp. 246-247. Hereafter this work is referred to as Epistel Postille.

[6]C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille (neunte Auflage; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1870), pp. 340-341. Hereafter this work is referred to as Evangelien Postille.

[7]Ibid., p. 130.

> parents who for a small payment have the opportunity to send their children to a Christian school, yes, tuition free if they are very poor, but who do not use even this opportunity to do something for their children's souls, consider their children their slaves, who must earn them money and for that reason even keep them out of school? . . . You sell your children, body and soul, to servants of the devil to earn a couple of rusty dollars. . . . Father, bear in mind, God has given you your infant into your bosom. God will again demand this child of you.[8]

A third class of sins which Walther frequently condemns can be included under the category of worldliness. In his sermon on Romans 12:1-6 "Be not conformed to this world" he gives particulars:

> My dear hearer, if you want to be a Christian, a spiritual priest, you dare not imitate the world but must sever connections with it; you must go a different way than the world goes; you dare not be intimate friends with the world; you dare not chase around with it in a disorderly life; you dare not partake of its vain lusts; you dare not go to places where the world gathers to serve its god, in the dance halls and in the taverns, in the gambling places and theaters;[9] you dare not for your relaxation and pleasure sit down where the scornful sit; you dare not be joined with them in secret societies; you dare not dress in the latest styles; in your rooms, at your table, you dare not follow the ostentation of the world; in all your outward associations you dare not act like a child of the world, ... Those you associate with here are the ones you will associate with in eternity; if you associate now with the world and only seem to associate with Christ and his Christians, you will also be lost with the world and never see the king-

---

[8] Ibid., p. 61.

[9] J. L. Gruber, Erinnerungen an Professor C. F. W. Walther und seine Zeit (Burlington: Lutheran Literary Board, n.d.), pp. 3-4, describes conditions thus: "In a German theater, a regularly engaged troupe of German actors and actresses gave German plays every evening, assisted by traveling artists of high rank. . . . In the German sections of the city there was a veritable swarm of saloons and beer gardens. At round tables this race of poets and thinkers drank beer, played cards and discussed news of the day."

> dom of heaven. While God's children sing praises with the angels in heaven, you will howl with the world in hell; . . . .[10]

Preaching on the rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, Walther scores the vanity of the young girls and women who can't primp long enough before coming to church in the hope that people will notice them. Indeed, says he, it is terrible that they even go to the Lord's Supper with these thoughts. And the poor who stare at them would do the same thing, if they only could. In the same breath he rebukes the parents who like to see their children stand in front of a mirror dolling themselves up. "Oh, you parents," he concludes, "who ought to be leading your children to deny the world!"[11]

Walther hurls his fiercest words of rebuke at those who live by a false faith, imagining that because the grace of God covers all sin, they can live in sin. Walther declares that there have always been preachers who have declared that

---

[10]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 68. One notices a tinge of legalism here. Presumably under church auspices beer drinking was not proscribed, since Gruber reports that after the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the Reformation, the congregation held a picnic in Concordia Park, at which beer flowed in streams and a portion of the profits flowed into the festival offering of the congregation. Gruber, op. cit., p. 95. Carl S. Mundinger, Government in the Missouri Synod (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947), p. 161, comes to Trinity's aid when he says that the minutes of Trinity bear out that Walther and the congregation took an "exceedingly firm stand over against excessive drinking."

[11]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 398. This last rebuke strikes us in the twentieth century as being rather severe.

the sea of divine love swallows the sins of all sinners; but the worst of these preachers is the one all Christians still have clinging to themselves, their flesh and blood.[12] They say, "I believe" with their mouth. But such a mouth-faith has no power. Rather it makes them powerless and secure and hurls them deeper into sin and ruin.[13] People who don't realize that true faith is not dead head-knowledge but must be something living, powerful, active and continually working,[14] commit not only the sin of unbelief but also of hypocrisy. For they act as though they accept the doctrine of reconciliation, but in their heart they despise it.[15] Hence a lost person can be one who walks with Christians, has fellowship with them, and outwardly lives a moral life.[16] The plain fact is that most people who come to church approve the doctrine of justification by faith, but that is all which they do. The very doctrine of justification by grace through faith becomes poison for them because

> They willfully misuse grace. If they hear that God forgives even the greatest sinners, they consider the greatest sins insignificant. When they hear that the Publican was justified when he cried: "God be merciful to me a sinner," they think that if they copy this word with their tongues and with a pious mien, the work of conversion is completed also in them, even if the old

---

[12] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 149.

[13] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 346.

[14] Ibid., p. 213.

[15] Ibid., p. 327.

[16] Ibid., p. 230.

> spirit remains. . . . If such hear that one does not become righteous before God by his good works, they conclude that it is unnecessary to be earnest and zealous in one's sanctification.[17]

Such people turn liberty into license. They fear no reprimand of God's Word but laugh at it. "They make the Savior a servant of sin and the lust of the world."[18] These people are bread and fish Christians who want to confess their allegiance to Christ with their mouth, and

> for that Christ should permit them, like the world to seek their fortune in the world, to be concerned about riches, to participate in worldly amusements, to go and sit in the theater, and dance hall, the taverns and night clubs where the mockers sit.[19]

People like that make a devil out of God, "for it is not God but the devil who pays attention to sin."[20]

Therefore, Walther does not tire of saying that whoever lives in mortal sin is no Christian. Der ist kein Christ is a kind of haunting refrain that runs through his sermons. Whoever cannot say, "Christ liveth in me" is no Christian.[21] Whoever trusts in money is no Christian.[22] Whoever does not want to walk with Christians is no Christian.[23] Whoever be-

---

[17]Ibid., pp. 279-280. Cf. Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 97.

[18]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 294. Cf. Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 7.

[19]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 243-244. Cf. Ibid., pp. 411-412.

[20]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 106.

[21]Ibid., p. 42.

[22]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 397.

[23]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 375.

comes proud ceases to be a Christian.[24] A person who lives in greed and impurity is a baptized heathen.[25] Whoever does not live in peace is a child of wrath.[26] If you are indifferent to missions, you are spiritually dead.[27]

And not to be a Christian is to fall into the hands of the just and righteous God. The following are brief samples of Walther's preaching of God's wrath against sin:

> Whoever does not work to become free of sin comforts himself in vain with the thought that God's Word has awakened him. Whoever deliberately lives in sin, in spite of his religious awakening, indeed, because of it, is a two-fold child of hell.[28]

> If Christ has not . . . been the comfort of your faith, then he remains your avenging judge. Nothing will erase the sins of your past life; they will follow you to the throne of God and remain with you forever and ever. Therefore, today, today, while the Father draws you to his Son, do not willfully resist him.[29]

> If you wish to remain unmerciful toward your neighbor, God takes away all his grace and becomes your enemy again. . . . He will be and remain your enemy forever and ever.[30]

> Anyone who lives in a dominant sin, be it fornication or uncleanness, or greed, or whatever it may be, is excluded from the kingdom of God and Christ; not God's grace but his wrath rests upon him. That person vainly imagines that his faith will help him into heaven

---

[24] Ibid., p. 240.

[25] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 136.

[26] Ibid., p. 81.

[27] Ibid., p. 56.

[28] Ibid., p. 5.

[29] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 40.

[30] Ibid., pp. 238-239.

> anyhow. Oh folly! His faith is nothing but an hallucination of the mind. . . . the Holy Spirit does not dwell in the soul obedient to sin. . . . Oh, my friends, be warned! Do not misuse the Gospel to dream up a God who does not become angry with sin.[31]

> Would it not be frightful to slip into the New Year with your unforgiven sins and awaken tomorrow burdened with God's wrath? Would it not be blasphemy to want to wait until that hour when God will say: "I am tired of showing you mercy!" O, be not deceived, God is not mocked. O today, today, if you will hear this voice, harden not your hearts.[32]

If a person persists in willful sin, God at last hardens his heart. Then "God's Word is preached to him in vain. It no longer makes an impression on him. His heart is as hard as a rock."[33]

> Whoever knows or to whom it is clearly and convincingly shown that something is sin, and he still does not want to leave his sin, and yet comforts himself in God's mercy, he sins against grace, tramples on God's Son who had to bleed for his sins, considers the blood of the testament as unclean, and abuses the Spirit of grace. Nothing else remains for him but a terrible waiting for the judgment and zeal which will consume the offender.[34]

The certainty of the judgment of God against those who live in sin should prompt the Christian both to self-examination and repentance. Every Christian has reason to search his own heart to see whether he is in faith. Walther contends that a person's own attitude and manner of life can tell him whether or not he is still a Christian.

---

[31] Ibid., pp. 142-143.

[32] Ibid., p. 45.

[33] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 270.

[34] Ibid., p. 106.

> If you do not need the power of the Holy Ghost to preserve your Christianity; if you do not have to hear and read God's Word zealously; if you do not have to watch, pray and struggle every day; if you do not need daily admonition, awakening, warning, reprimand and comfort; if you do not need this so that your knowledge is and remains alive, your light of faith bright, your love ardent, and your humility and patience upright, your Christianity is undoubtedly the work of your own power.[35]

In rapport with the stern preaching of the Law Walther consistently preaches repentance. If God is not to withdraw his grace, Walther sees no other way except that Christians humble themselves before God in true repentance, acknowledge their great guilt, seek grace in Christ, and earnestly pray that God help them.[36] A person is to throw away all previous comforts and seek grace alone in Christ.[37] Nor is a person to be satisfied merely with a few pious sighs.

> Therefore, if you do not want to deceive yourself about your soul's salvation, for God's sake do not be satisfied with a few sighs and good intentions; no, you must repent and turn to God with your whole heart so that you will become an entirely different person in heart, state of mind, disposition and all powers. . . . Humble yourself as David did, bemoan your guilt as he did; plead persistently and earnestly as he did for grace, for forgiveness of all your sins alone for the sake of Christ's blood and then for a pure heart and a new, right spirit. That, that is the right way; then you will also find grace; God will enter into you and make your heart his temple again.[38]

Without a doubt, one of the factors which led people to accept reproof from Walther was the fact that he was

---

[35]Ibid., p. 269. Cf. Ibid., pp. 44-45. Cf. also the long series of questions Walther asks to aid a person in his self-examination.

[36]Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, p. 154.

[37]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 240.

[38]Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 137-138.

humble enough to confess his own sins publicly. In a penitential sermon on 1 Peter 5:6, after rebuking his hearers for their own sins, Walther says:

> I readily confess that I myself bear a great part of the blame because I have not labored among you with the faithfulness, the zeal, and the wisdom that I should have; for this I humble myself here before God and before all of you; but I also ask of you, follow me, you elders, follow after me; you fathers and mothers, you sons and daughters, humble yourselves with me under the mighty hand of God; acknowledge to him your unfaithfulness and sins with bitter sorrow and plead with me for grace before the throne of him who has mercy upon us.[39]

Although in the instances cited above, Walther does direct the terrified sinner to the consolation of the Gospel, one finds, much to his surprise, that he does not do that consistently. This is all the more strange when one recalls that in his great work, Gesetz und Evangelium, he says the Reformed err when

> Sinners who have been struck down and terrified by the Law are directed, not to the Word and Sacraments, but to their own prayers and wrestlings with God in order that they may win their way into the state of grace.[40]

Although he condemns the practice, Walther has sermons in which the terrified sinner is told simply to repent and to pray for grace. The following are cases in point:

In the application of his sermon on the nine thankless

---

[39]Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, p. 145.

[40]C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, translated from the German edition of 1897 by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), p. 127.

lepers,[41] Walther points out that through ingratitude we hinder the spread of the kingdom; in addition, God takes his Word from us, and thirdly, we face a wretched end. Then follow the concluding paragraphs of the sermon:

> O how unfortunate you will be in time of need or when the hour of death comes upon you. Then you will experience that your faith was really no faith; then you will not stand up under the trial; you will have no comfort; your conscience will accuse you and with sighings and misery [Ach und Weh] you will leave this world.
>
> Therefore, let us all who must admit that our faith has been an unfruitful tree, turn to Christ, acknowledging with repentant hearts that our unthankfulness for his Gospel is the greatest sin, and pray him, the author and finisher of our faith, for the true faith.
>
> O, if we all did this, how our congregation would bloom as a well-watered garden.[42]

Another case in point is his sermon for the Fifth Sunday After Easter, Standard Gospel, John 16, 23-30. In his application he had been talking about hypocrites who are God's enemies through their love of sin and their neglect of prayer. Then he concludes:

> realize that you are not yet Christians, because one who prays zealously and earnestly and a Christian are one and the same. Therefore, repent. Confess your unconverted, ungodly, fleshly manner of life, and pray God for the Spirit of faith; in this way you will receive the Spirit of grace and prayer. How eager God is to pour him out upon you! But then, do not grieve him through new sins, but follow his leading; in that way you will go through life praying; you will daily have blessed experiences of the way in which God hears prayer, and at the last your final petition will be heard and by a blessed death

---

[41] It is curious that in this sermon he does not speak of the one who returned to give thanks.

[42] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 544.

> you will come through the danger to certainty, out of the miserable world to the blessed heaven.[43]

What I miss in these two instances is a direct reference to the forgiving grace of God in Christ Jesus.

A third illustration will suffice. In Walther's sermon on Luke 11:14-28, Walther concludes:

> O, therefore, my dear hearers, I ask you, let us today judge our entire Christianity according to the judgment of Christ: "He that is not with me is against me; he that gathereth not with me scattereth." And if we find that it does not stand up under the judgment of God, let us humble ourselves before God in true repentance and earnestly plead for the Holy Ghost. Then, however, let us through his power lead a true Christian life, that is no longer in word, but in deed and in truth--to the glory and honor of God, the furtherance of his glorious kingdom and to our eternal salvation.[44]

This sermon, a terrifying denunciation of false Christianity throughout, is saved from being entirely without gospel only by three lines of the concluding hymn verse:

> Jesus, strengthen your children
> And make those conquerors
> Whom you have purchased with your blood.[45]

Summary

From Walther's sermons directed to correcting an ungodly life one can learn something about preaching the Law. Walther's Law preaching is specific; quite generally it aims at sins of which his people are or could be guilty. Except on a national

---

[43]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 193.

[44]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 236.

[45]Ibid.

day of penitence, Walther does not paint a lurid picture of national sins, imagining that that is preaching the Law in all its severity. His Law preaching generally "stays close to home." One can learn from Walther the helpful lesson of depicting sins in terms of concrete situations in which also one's church members could be involved.

However, there is a strange austerity in Walther's view of what is right and what is wrong. No doubt his reference to wearing the latest fashions, setting a good table, and using the mirror are remnants of the influence of Pietism. A wise preacher must guard against legalism.

Again, Walther gives the hypocrite neither comfort nor rest. He becomes bitter in his denunciation of the man who wants the benefits of Christianity without accepting its responsibilities. He simply has a false faith with which he will be damned. Here one hears the voice of John the Baptist and of our Lord.

Notice, too, how Walther always preaches the judgment of God against sin. The God he knows is no indulgent father who gives rules only to lament their being disobeyed. His God is righteous and just, the God Moses knew. In sermons coming off the presses in the twentieth century I miss this note of judgment. But one cannot be a good Gospel preacher unless he knows how to preach the Law in its judging and condemning force.

Hard upon his proclamation of the righteous judgment of God against sin and the sinner, Walther preaches repentance, a heartfelt recognition of sin and a turning to God for grace.

And quite generally Walther follows his own dictum of directing the terrified sinner to the Gospel. But at times he fails to hold up the picture of the crucified and instead tells the terrified sinner: "Tut Busze und bittet um Gnade," repent and pray for grace. This is doubtless another of the trappings of Pietism which Walther found it difficult to throw off.

In this chapter we have had an opportunity to see how Walther employs Law and Gospel as tools in correcting an ungodly life. His use of these two words of God is particularly interesting in our next chapter in which he encourages the Christian to a godly life.

CHAPTER VIII

THE USE OF THE WORD FOR ENCOURAGING TO A GODLY LIFE

When Walther is rebuking an ungodly life he is using the Law as a force to hurt and wound and kill the sinner so that he will come to himself and become contrite. However, when he seeks to encourage to a godly life he seeks to draw and to win the sinner to a life of faith and love. Here Walther, like a lawyer, pleads the cause of Jesus Christ and seeks to bring the sinner to the verdict of accepting Christ and following him. In this brief section, therefore, we shall consider Walther's program of persuasion by which he seeks to lead his hearers to the goals of faith and love.

At the outset, it is well to note that Walther thinks of his hearers in terms of unbelievers and believers. The following excerpt, taken from Walther's sermon on Christ the Good Shepherd, John 10:12-16, indicates the double thrust of many of Walther's applications:

> You who want to pasture yourselves, protect yourselves, and lead yourselves to heaven, who do not see yourselves yet as lost sheep, you can as yet not recognize Christ as your true Shepherd; you want to be your own shepherd; you want to do yourself what Christ has done for you. . . . O, if only you would let your eyes be opened, you would realize that you are still on the wrong way; you would see that you are standing at the precipice of damnation, from which only the Good Shepherd, Jesus, can draw you back.
>
> But you, who know that you are straying sheep but who

> always do not want to grasp Christ in faith, why do you keep yourselves from coming to Christ? . . . Shall Christ always have to pursue you and still you do not want to let yourselves be found?
>
> But you, beloved hearers, who have already made this blessed acquaintance, never forget that in this knowledge all your well-being, hope and salvation consists. Listen faithfully to his voice and follow him.[1]

It immediately disturbs our twentieth century ears to hear Walther apply the text first to unbelievers and then to Christians, because a guiding principle today is that the sermon is addressed to a congregation of Christians.

Some have tried to explain Walther's practice by referring to the fact that between 1820 and 1880 ten million immigrants came to the United States and that the population of St. Louis increased from 16,000 in 1840 to 160,000 in 1860,[2] and that by 1840 one-third to one-fourth of the total population of St. Louis was German.[3] This set of circumstances would undoubtedly bring many visitors to Trinity Church every Sunday. On this ground Walther could be justified for addressing himself also to unbelievers.

However, the real cause of Walther's practice lies in his firm belief that in every Christian congregation there

---

[1]C. F. W. Walther, Licht des Lebens, edited by C. J. Otto Hanser (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905), pp. 318-319. Cf. Ibid., pp. 87-88. 397-398. 162.

[2]The statistics, not the judgment, are from F. R. Webber, A History of Preaching in Britain and America (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1952), III, 322. 324.

[3]Walter O. Forster, Zion on the Mississippi (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953), p. 251.

are many who are Christians in name only, who are in need of conversion.[4] Hence, he feels constrained to seek to persuade them to accept the Gospel and to bring forth the fruits of repentance.

Walther's first step in his program of persuasion is to show his hearers precisely what the will of God requires. A scanning of his sermon themes indicates that they have a practical bent. He preaches to objects far more than he does to subjects. A part of Walther's consummate skill as a preacher lies just in this fact. One needs only scan the index of any of his sermon books to be convinced that Walther aims in his themes at producing a change in his hearers.

Furthermore, in the body of his sermons, Walther avoids the abstract discussion of moral principles. Much more frequently he describes what a Christian is like, what he does and does not do in given situations. Although this is a good persuasive device, Walther at times succumbs to the temptation of describing an ideal Christian who simply does not exist this side of eternity. The following are a few samples of this misrepresentation:

> When a man truly learns to know Christ, . . . he leaves himself entirely. He knows God is his highest good. He seeks in him ever greater blessedness. He becomes completely united with God and will sacrifice everything for him.[5]

---

[4] Supra, pp. 192-194.

[5] C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille (neunte Auflage; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1870), p. 343. Hereafter this work is referred to as Evangelien Postille.

> Christians trust one another. They know for sure that a Christian means what he says. No one is afraid that the other dissembles and deceives. If he is friendly, the other knows that he is honest in his friendliness. If he reprimands a fellow-Christian, the one reprimanded knows that the other has done so only out of love and concern for his soul. If a Christian in his dealings sins against someone, he knows that it did not happen from malice but from weakness.[6]

> The Christian . . . says with Job, "Though the Lord slay me, yet will I trust in him."[7]

Furthermore, the unbeliever is described as one "still without peace, without rest, without true blessing."[8]

The danger, obviously, in this sort of misrepresentation is that the weak Christian will easily be led to despair because he does not measure up to the standard of the ideal Christian described in the sermon.[9] Similarly, the unbeliever who is enjoying rest, prosperity and health, will not see himself in this picture of one who is without joy, rest, and blessing and will only be confirmed in his false faith.

Another persuasive technique which Walther employs effectively is to answer any possible objection which a person might raise against doing what he ought to do. Here is

---

[6] Ibid., p. 376.

[7] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 224.

[8] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 210.

[9] It is surprising that Walther himself violates thesis XVII of Gesetz und Evangelium: "the Word of God is not rightly divided when a description of faith is given, both as regards its strength and the consciousness and productiveness of it, that does not fit all believers at all times." C. F. W. Walther, The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel, translated from the German edition of 1897 by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929), p. 308.

an example of Walther's grappling for a soul by removing impediments:

> Do not listen to the voice of your heart which wants to refuse you grace. The heart is not your judge, but the Word of God is, and that says to you, "Come, for all things are now ready." Do not let the Law frighten you. . . . the Law has no right over those who flee to Christ, because Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone that believeth (Romans 10:4). Do not become frightened if Satan shoots the fiery thought that your sins are too great or that you have sinned too long, or that you have fallen away too often. The words, "Come, for all things are now ready," shall continue until judgment day. . . . You can and should come to receive grace for grace. . . . Now perhaps many a person will say, "I would gladly come, but I am afraid that I lack the requisite living knowledge of my sins." You who complain of this, bear in mind that man should not find grace through a knowledge of his sins, but through faith in Christ. It does not depend upon the degree of the knowledge of sins. . . . Perhaps another says: "I fear that I may deceive myself." . . . Whoever turns to Christ to receive grace through him does not deceive himself, for then Christ, who says: "Come, for all things are now ready," must deceive him. But he does not deceive you.[10]

Furthermore, and this is especially evident in his applications, Walther tells his hearers precisely what they are to do. He is not content simply to state the truth of a doctrinal proposition and then, as the saying goes, to let the Gospel do its own work. Indeed, not! Consistently he shows what change ought to take place on the basis of the truth which he has demonstrated. He really answers the question of Pentecost: "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"[11] He shows how the goal of the sermon can be achieved by avoiding certain sins and by positive action. One illustration will suffice here. Answer-

---

[10]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 228. Cf. Ibid., p. 233.

[11]Acts 2:37.

ing the question, "What should a person do that he may find the right Christ when many are saying, 'Lo, here is Christ; lo, there'?" Walther says:

> Be sinners, lost sinners, in your own eyes, and let Christ, his merit be your righteousness. . . . let Christ and his comfort be your only power and strength. . . . Do not take the garments of your own works if you seek righteousness; in short, throw all your misery, your rottenness, all your sins, misery, death, and damnation on Christ and take him for your one and all.[12]

However, Walther is psychologist enough and homiletician enough to know that merely to convince a person to do something is not enough. He knows that the seat of action lies in the emotions, and so we find him seeking to move the will of his hearers by making appeals that strike the heart.

Walther's appeals are varied. On occasion he appeals to the love and gratitude which a person ought to have. The following are examples of this appeal:

> Whoever does good not out of love and gratitude but out of hope of reward, his good is like wormy fruit; outwardly it shines, but inwardly it is full of rottenness.[13]

> Even if we had not promised God and God had not commanded us, the love and thanks we owe Christ should move us not to deny him under any circumstances or for any consideration. Do we not consider it most shameful when a person is ashamed of his faithful friend and denies him behind his back?[14]

> Does not every Christian owe God a debt of love? But can a Christian say he loves God if he calmly sees Satan, the enemy of God, holding millions of people captive? A Christian is obligated not only to love God but also his

---

[12]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 664.

[13]Ibid., pp. 180-181.

[14]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 23-24.

> brethren. . . . Furthermore, we owe the Indians a huge debt because our forefathers drove them from their land.[15]

These citations have one thing in common: they make the same mistake of confusing ends and means. Love and gratitude are goals of conduct; they cannot be used at the same time as means for achieving the goal of love. To do that is to throw man back upon his own resources.

Appeals of this sort are relatively rare in Walther. For the most part he appeals to the grace of God revealed in Christ in encouraging to faith and love.[16]

At times he uses the example of Christ to encourage people to follow his steps. In one sermon he says that if Christ was holiness itself, if he became a friend of sinners and ate and drank with them, "how foolish and laughable it is when a man regards himself so holy and pious that he despises any sinner."[17]

In another sermon he appeals to the example of Christ:

> You hear how Christ in his passion took the guilt of others upon himself. . . . Do not only comfort yourself in that when your lovelessness condemns you, but

---

[15] Ibid., pp. 52-53.

[16] In a letter dated March 15, 1862, to the young pastor, Stephanus Keyl, Walther explains why one must preach the Gospel to produce good works: The Gospel must be "the chief thing, as the real Kern und Stern of every sermon. That and nothing else makes joyous Christians, willing to do good works, full of love, humble, good, zealous. . . . If you see in people lawlessness and outbursts of fleshly lusts, you will be tempted to withhold the costly pearls of the Gospel message; but that is wrong. Nothing but this message can help these poor, sick, dead people out of their rottenness." Briefe von C. F. W. Walther, edited by L. Fuerbringer (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1915), I, 175.

[17] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 254.

> also follow Christ, and do not live to yourself but for your brethren. . . . You hear how Christ in his passion manifested the highest love to his enemies. . . . Do not only comfort yourself with that . . . but learn from your heart to forgive those who have sinned against you; . . . . You hear how patient Christ was. . . . Do not only comfort yourself with that . . . but also follow Christ, your heavenly example, carry patiently your cross and remain a quiet lamb when lions surround you.[18]

In his confirmation addresses Walther likes to appeal to the blessings God conferred in baptism as an incentive to steadfastness in faith.

> We are baptized! Oh, what inexpressible grace! There God has cast all our sins into the depths of the sea; there God has assured us that he has loved us from eternity and chosen us to salvation before the foundation of the world was laid; there God has assured us that he is our Father and that we are his children; there God has opened heaven to us and it remains open to us forever.
>
> Therefore, if after your baptism you have again loved sins and the world and have lost the Spirit of grace from your heart . . . you are in a sad way. But . . . if you have lost your child-like heart toward him, He has never lost his Father's heart toward you.
>
> But now you should return, confess your iniquity with remorse and sorrow and fly back again into the arms which your Heavenly Father has opened to you in baptism.[19]

In a similar vein he pleads with one who has fallen from grace: "Think back to the time when you for the first time turned to Christ. Did he not receive you in a friendly manner? . . . Go again the same way. The spring of grace

---

[18] Ibid., pp. 204-205.

[19] C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille (zweite Auflage; St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1882), pp. 166-167. Hereafter this work is referred to as Epistel Postille. Cf. C. F. W. Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, edited by H. Sieck (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892), p. 295.

is still open."[20]

More frequently Walther appeals directly to the love of Jesus.

> But you who feel how incomplete your love is . . . know that here no man comes to perfect love. Everything, also love, remains incomplete; therefore do not seek your strength in your arms, but in Christ's rich, all-embracing love. This covers up your lack. However, the more you contemplate this love and sink yourselves in this love, the more will your own love grow, until it is perfected there when you will see God's eternal love face to face.[21]

> Since the Lord waves his flag of victory in a new heavenly life, let us also begin to walk with him in such a new heavenly life even more zealously than before.[22]

> My dear Christian friends, the Lord is at hand, not to judge you, but to absolve you, and it is that above all which should move you to let your forbearance be known to all men. Think of that day and night; it will make your heart ever softer, friendlier, sweeter, milder over against your neighbor, be he friend or foe.[23]

Walther also uses the motivation of the rewards of grace which await the Christian as an encouragement to the Christian to fight the good fight of faith. He says: "indescribably great things await you in heaven; therefore do not become tired in your warfare."[24]

---

[20]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 372.

[21]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 534.

[22]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 197.

[23]Ibid., p. 28. Curiously enough, I found two sermons in which there is no Gospel motivation at all: Ibid., pp. 76-77. Cf. Ibid., pp. 82-83.

[24]Ibid., p. 8.

> If you often find it difficult to bear the burden and heat of the day while others live according to the lusts of the flesh . . . do not murmur as those first who became last, but think of the blessed hour when the master of the heavenly vineyard will say to his steward, "Call the laborers and give them their hire."[25]

> Whoever here gladly sacrifices the temporal for the spiritual will there find that each self-denial, even the least which he here exercised, as capital which God deposited for him, for which God pays him eternal interest.[26]

Most significant are those passages in which Walther employs both Law and Gospel in his application, with the intent that each should perform its function, the former to kill, the latter to make alive. In his application to the sermon on the Wedding Feast, Luke 14:16-24, Walther says:

> yes, in as friendly a manner as Christ here coaxes all to his supper, in so wrathful a manner will he there hurl those from him who despise his friendly invitations preferring the miserable things of this world to his heavenly pleasures and joys, which he so bitterly earned for us.[27]

In his sermon on the child Jesus in the Temple, Walther encourages children to live a godly life:

> In Holy Baptism God has also given you the Holy Spirit and cleansed your heart through faith. Only believe on your dear Savior. If you believe that he redeemed and washed you from all your sins, he will also give you the power to walk after his example. O follow him.[28]

A little later he addresses the children thus:

> What will Christ say to you who have despised your

---

[25]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 95.

[26]Ibid., p. 256.

[27]Ibid., p. 226.

[28]Ibid., p. 64.

> parents, thrown their admonition to the winds, grieved them daily and then not even once regarded their tears and sighs which you wrung out of them by your disobedience? . . . Woe to you forever and ever.[29]

Walther employs this technique of combining Law and Gospel in a single application particularly when he is addressing the unbelievers. He seeks to arouse the indifferent from their lethargy both by the thundering of Sinai and the pleading of Golgotha. He sets before them the alternatives of sin and grace, heaven or hell, salvation or damnation. As a persuasive device there is none better, for people make decisions when they are confronted with alternatives. But Walther does more than present the alternatives; with apostolic fervor he pleads with the unbeliever to accept the grace of God in Christ. It is this compelling note that is so much of Walther's strength and so much of the modern pulpit's weakness.

Here are examples of Walther's technique: In an Advent sermon on Matthew 21:1-9, he is showing the effect which Christ's coming to us through his Word ought to have on us.

> Should you want to remain in your sins, in your misery, in your life without grace also in this new year? Your conscience tells you that without Christ you are lost; otherwise you would not have come into this church where Christ is preached every Sunday as the only way to salvation. Oh, consider how patient God has been with you up to now. If God during the last year had taken you in your unconverted condition from the land of the living through a sudden death, you would now be in hell from which there is no release. But, behold, God, who does not desire the death of the wicked, but that he live and be converted, kept you alive and permits you now today

---

[29] Ibid., p. 65.

> again to be preached the Gospel of his saving grace in Christ; and Christ himself comes to you under the sound of this sermon and calls to you: "Come to me. I have often called you. What have I done to you that you flee from me? Behold the wounds that I permitted to be inflicted upon me for your sake. . . . I am not an enemy, but the Savior. . . . O give place in your heart to the feeling of your sinfulness and misery in which you are lying without me and come to me; my arms are open for you."
>
> Do not think of yourself, "I will wait for awhile.". . . Perhaps today you are beginning your last year of grace. Therefore, come, come; now is the time to awake from sleep; now is the day of salvation.[30]

In a Good Friday sermon Walther combines Law and Gospel in this ringing appeal to the unbeliever:

> You offended God but he did not wait until you would come to him. He knew that you would never seek him if you should have to make the beginning. Although the most high God was offended, he took the lead and offered you the hand of reconciliation first. He also let his own Son die for you to reconcile and admonish you, yes, through his servants earnestly to beg you with tears of love and pity. Be ye reconciled to God; be ye reconciled to God stand written on the cross of the Mediator with legible, blood-red letters for all sinners. "Be ye reconciled to God" cries every drop of the blood which streams from his wounds. "Be ye reconciled to God" the cherubim with angels' voices call from the mercy-seat. "Be ye reconciled to God" thunder the splitting rocks. . . . Woe to him who remains deaf before these thousands of voices. Woe to him who despises the love which died for him. . . . For him there is not only no help, but the very blood which here pleads for him for mercy will in eternity cry against him for vengeance.[31]

Summary

A hallmark of Walther's sermons is that they are practical. Although at times he appears to be speaking to a subject, most

---

[30]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 18.

[31]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 155-156.

of the time he follows the good practice of preaching to a faith-centered or life-centered goal. By his own definition the sermon is to bring to faith and keep in faith. And he fashions his sermons to accomplish these goals.

It is both interesting and instructive to see how Walther moves toward his goals. First, he sets forth what the Lord requires. Here instead of speaking abstractly about Christian virtue, he generally personalizes truth, showing what a Christian does or does not do in a given situation.

Having demonstrated what the will of God is, Walther is careful to outline quite concretely what a person is to do in order to achieve the goal. He spells out in precise terms what the program of change is which his theme calls for.

Next, he disarms his hearers by answering all possible objections their flesh might have for engaging energetically in the program of change.

But thus far he has been making his appeals only to the intellect. Now he turns to the heart by appealing to motives which ought to prompt to action. Forgetting at times that love and gratitude are goals of behavior and not motives for conduct, Walther misfires when he appeals to these as motives. However, it is interesting to note that Walther does not use the appeal to self-interest. Instead his appeal quite generally is to the love of God as the motive for a life of love.

Nor does Walther hesitate to use the Law in his program of persuasion. However, he does not make the mistake of trying

to get people to do what they ought to do driven solely by the Law. Instead, he uses the Law as a negative motivator. The Law is there to show the hearer the consequences of his failure to move toward the goal. But close at hand is the picture of the gracious God in Christ. Presented with these alternatives, Walther pleads with the hearer to act as grace prompts.

Old and cold, his sermons still vibrate with a passionate concern that his hearers be and remain children of God. How Walther could plead! A century after his sermons were first written one can tell that they were not produced to be admired but to be tools to do the Spirit's work in the world of people. His sermons made a difference in men's lives; and also today the highest aim of the sermon must be to effect a change in men's lives!

CHAPTER IX

THE USE OF THE WORD FOR COMFORT

When Walther wants to reprove sin, he has a stern, uncompromising heart; when he wants to encourage to a godly life, his is a pleading heart; when he wants to comfort, he reveals his great father-heart, full of concern for all the troubled.

In his passages of comfort Walther preaches pure Gospel and only Gospel. In fact, he preaches the Gospel as though there were no Law. In one sermon he says this:

> If you have looked at him [i.e. Christ] as a Moses, a stern judge of anxious sinners, yes, a foe not only of sins, but also of sinners, let go such thoughts of Christ. . . . One must remember that the devil draws a false Christ, yes, disguises himself in his image.[1]

Again, he advises:

> You have once for all at last to turn your backs upon the Law and turn to the Gospel. You must throw yourselves as you are into the outstretched arms of the Savior; . . . . You must hold to the Word of God and faith and say: "Even though my heart says no, God's Word shall be more sure to me."[2]

When he comforts, his theme is the universal grace of God in Christ.

---

[1] C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille (neunte Auflage; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1870), p. 355. Hereafter this work is referred to as Evangelien Postille.

[2] C. F. Walther, Licht des Lebens, edited by C. J. Otto Hanser (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905), p. 592.

> there is no one among us whom the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, does not seek. Christ bears all of us on his heart. He has followed us from the first moment of our life with his mercy. . . . He does not count the multitude, greatness, or grievousness of our sins in order thus to apportion the grace he would show us. He merely asks whether we are sinners, whether we are lost and strayed. That alone moves him to receive us.[3]

This comfort of the universal grace of God Walther applies to all sorts and conditions of men. He has on his heart those who are troubled by the weight of their sins and comforts them in an Easter sermon thus:

> You who also feel the weight of the chains of your sins and yearn to be free from their right to accuse, torment, and condemn you, to you I speak today the blessed word of Easter: Freedom! O do not suppose that because you are conscious of so many of your sins, you must fear their threats. . . . When the Lord hung on the cross he fastened his promissory note to it, canceled it with his blood, and today with the pardon of grace and forgiveness he has come forth from the grave. . . . Let your conscience, let the whole world, let the devil and his whole army accuse you before God; they are false witnesses; they are rejected accusers. If they testify against you, the resurrected Son of God testifies for you; if they accuse you, your Mediator frees you; if they appeal to God's righteousness, the Resurrected appeals to his death and the resurrection and acquittal arranged by the Father himself. . . . No, you do not have to earn this freedom nor struggle for it; it has been earned already; it has been battled for. . . . There is only one thing you should do: through faith include yourself in this triumphal procession to which the apostle and an innumerable host of confessors of Jesus Christ have joined themselves.[4]

In another sermon he tells troubled sinners: "Go to Golgotha. . . . If your sins should cry to God for vengeance, that

---

[3]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 232.

[4]C. F. W. Walther, Americanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille (zweite Auflage; St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1882), p. 202. Hereafter this work is referred to as Epistel Postille.

blood cries louder for grace."[5] Again, he uses the bold picture that even if one murdered the Son of God with his own hands, grace which flows from Christ's death on the Cross would be there also for him to open the locked gates of paradise.[6]

Walther reminds those who are despairing because of their own sin and are looking for a way of escape only to believe.

> All of you who feel misery in which you lie, ... you should neither lose courage nor wear yourselves out by your own efforts. . . . You are to do nothing but believe in the certain, true, precious Word that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and you also; and you will immediately discover how God's great heart opens for you and how the streams of the Spirit descend and flow into your wretched heart. . . . O that I could today persuade all of you who feel in your hearts that you are worthless sinners not to consult for a moment with flesh and blood but to break through all unbelief and say to Christ: "Thou crucified and resurrected one, ascended Lord, you are mine because I grasp you and do not let you go, my light, out of my heart."[7]

Applying the balm of the Gospel to other spiritual ills, Walther says to the doubter:

> Do not doubt, for where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. Flee to the cross of Christ; hide yourself in the wound of Christ, ... Then God will show you grace, and you will become like the thief on the cross.[8]

To those who are so anxious that they cannot weep or discover the depths of their remorse, Walther says: "Christ himself has shed so many tears that even you can receive grace and

---

[5]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 404.

[6]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 187.

[7]Ibid., pp. 264-265.

[8]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 183.

forgiveness."[9] To those who want to believe but cannot, Walther gives this comfort:

> If you yearn for Christ and his grace, feeling at the same time that you have no power to seize him in true faith, this is no sign that you are without faith. It shows merely that your faith is weak and that you do not want to be deceived by a false faith. . . . Your yearning for faith is also faith. . . . Continue with this desire; say to Christ with the afflicted father, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."[10]

Although Walther's primary concern is for the spiritual needs of men, he by no means is blind to their physical wants. Applying the story of the slaying of the innocents, Walther has this word for parents:

> If you stand at the sickbed of one of your little children and your weak heart is at the point of breaking because of their suffering, do not murmur against your God. He, the most tender Heavenly Father, loves your children more than you can love them; just because he loves them, he lets them often suffer so severely and bitterly here. They must sow here with many tears that some day they may reap much with joy. . . . Therefore say even at the bed of pain of your beloved children, "Lord, as thou wilt; thy will be done."[11]

Nor does Walther neglect to preach the Gospel also to the unbelievers. Although he says that the Law should be preached first to the unbeliever, he by no means implies that the Gospel is not to be addressed to him. Notice how Walther preaches the Gospel in the following passage:

> But also you, who up till now have not followed Christ as his disciple . . . also you are not excluded from the great joy of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ,

---

[9]Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 191-192.

[10]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 40.

[11]Ibid., p. 51

> unless you exclude yourself. . . . Even though up till now you have not loved him, he loves you and has rich grace also for you; . . . he asks about you. . . . You have indeed in an unanswerable fashion sinned against your Savior, but behold, he wants to win you not with wrath but with love. . . . so he comes on this first morning of the new year and says to you: "What wrong have I done you, O sinner? Have I not out of love come into the world and died on the cross also for you? . . . Do you not want to come to me in this new year? O come, come, my arms are open to receive you; come, I want to forgive your sins; come, I want to save you."[12]

From all that has been said, it is evident that Walther preaches the Gospel as though there were no Law. In bold, inviting language he invites even the greatest of sinners to the feast of God's grace. Moreover, he turns the light of the Gospel upon all the shaded and dark areas of life. He speaks in turn to the doubter, the great sinner, the despairing, those troubled with physical woes, and for them all God is still the waiting Father in Christ. Nor does Walther make the mistake of taking the edge off the Gospel by introducing demands of the Law. When he preaches the Gospel it is almost too good to be true; but that is how good the Gospel is!

---

[12]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 5-6. Cf. Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 4.

CHAPTER X

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TEXT AND THE SERMON

This chapter raises two interesting questions: first, what type of preacher was Walther, textual or topical? The second question is: is he a faithful expositor of the text?

In answer to the first question, I shall try to show that Walther cannot categorically be called either a textual or a topical preacher because he employs both methods. However, he leans more in the direction of the topical than the textual method.[1]

To be sure, Walther has many sermons which follow the textual method. His chief thoughts are taken directly from the text; his theme represents the chief thought of the text; and in his development of the sermon he uses his text faithfully and fully. Generally he follows either the analytic or synthetic method, and occasionally the homily style.

The following are examples of his use of the analytic method:

Text: 2 Peter 3:3-14

Theme and parts:

---

[1]After one has read quite a few of Walther's sermons, the statement of Fritz draws a smile: "A fault that must be found with Walther's preaching is that his sermons were not always textual." J. H. C. Fritz, "Walther, the Preacher," Concordia Theological Monthly, VII (October, 1936), 748.

How necessary it is properly to prepare for the last day

I. Because it is certain;
II. Because it will come suddenly to the fear of the unbeliever;
III. Because it will be a blessed day for Christians.[2]

Text: Mark 8:1-9

Theme and parts:

How did Christ reveal himself in the feeding of the four thousand?

I. As the almighty Son of the living God;
II. As the pitying and friendly Savior of all the miserable.[3]

On the story of the Good Samaritan, Walther has this interesting treatment:

Text: Luke 10:23-37

Theme and parts:

The love of the neighbor, a fruit of the Gospel

I. Without faith, there is no true love;
II. Without love, there is no true faith.[4]

Text: John 16:5-15

Theme and parts:

The conviction which the Holy Ghost alone works

I. Of sin;
II. Of righteousness;
III. Of judgment.[5]

---

[2]C. F. W. Walther, Licht des Lebens, edited by C. J. Otto Hanser (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905), p. 665.

[3]Ibid., p. 465..

[4]Ibid., p. 522.

[5]C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille (neunte Auflage; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1870), p. 184. Hereafter this work is referred to as Evangelien Postille.

At times Walther uses also the synthetic method. By taking a thought derived from the application of the analytic theme and making that thought the theme of the sermon, he is able to build the practical sermons for which he is justly famous. The following are examples of this method:

On the text Matthew 11:7-10 in which Christ says that John the Baptist is not a reed shaken by the wind nor one who wears soft clothing, Walther constructs this interesting outline:

Christ's judgment of the demands the world makes on the preacher of the Gospel

I. When they demand that in respect to doctrine he be like a wavering reed;
II. When they demand in respect to life that he be a friend of the world.[6]

On the parable of the marriage of the king's son, Matthew 22:1-14, Walther has the following theme and parts:

Why is the despising and misuse of the Gospel the greatest of sins?

I. Because God performed such a miracle of love so that the Gospel could be preached to men;

II. Because the Gospel does not demand hard works, but only the believing acceptance of grace.[7]

A third illustration will suffice:

Text: Luke 21:25-36.

Theme and parts:

---

[6]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 31.

[7]Ibid., p. 626.

How foolish in our day to imagine one's self safe from judgment day

I. Because of the signs which have already come to pass;
II. Because of the circumstances in which the world finds itself;
III. Because of the suddenness with which judgment day will come.[8]

Unlike Luther, Walther rarely uses the homily type of development. For the most part he speaks to a well-stated theme. However, on occasion he employs the homily style, using a title as the theme and unfolding the narrative step by step. One such outline is on the story of the slaughter of the innocents, Matthew 2:13-23. This is Walther's outline:

The murder of the children of Bethlehem

I. The unfortunate tool by which this was done;
II. The good reasons why God permitted it to happen;
III. The important meaning which it still has for us.[9]

Although in many of his sermons Walther uses the whole text as material for his sermon, in many more cases he uses only a verse or two of the text which he reads. The reason for this practice is that Walther was quite bound to the pericopic systems.[10] Consequently, he frequently preached on

---

[8]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 7.

[9]Ibid., p. 43.

[10]Of the church year Walther says: "That the Christians have their own division of time according to the church year is a blessing and an advantage which indeed only Christians realize, which they alone know how to treasure, which indeed is important enough that also here in our new fatherland we should not leave it as have the sects, but with all seriousness and zeal should hold to this old rule of the Christian church." Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 1-2. He proceeds to

the same text. For the sake of variety, he at times fastens his attention on just one facet of the text. When about to preach on the text, John 10:12-16, Walther points out that the text demonstrates that Christ is the Good Shepherd in three ways: (1) He gives his life for the sheep; (2) He knows and cares for each one; and (3) He seeks the lost sheep. Then he tells his hearers that in this sermon he wants to dwell only on the last point, namely, Christ's pastoral office, that there shall be one fold and one Shepherd.[11] Similarly, on the text, John 16:5-15, he informs the congregation that he wants to preach only on the words: "The Holy Ghost shall convict the world of sin because they believe not on me." He then proceeds, taking as his theme: "Unbelief the Chief Sin."[12] This practice, very common in Walther, runs a bit awry, I think, when, preaching on 1 Corinthians 9:24-10:5, he tells his congregation that he has often spoken of Christianity as a race and as a duel; hence,

---

show that using the church year is like taking a journey and pausing to rest each Sunday, forgetting the tribulation of the journey in the worship and praise of God. Ibid., p. 2. Scanning the indexes to Walther's sermon books one finds sermons not only for the Sundays and major festivals of the church year but also for the following days: Second Christmas Day, Second Easter Day, Purification of Mary, the Annunciation, the Visitation, St. John the Baptist's Day, St. Michael's Day, and Day of Humiliation and Prayer.

[11]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 172.

[12]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 333.

today he begs leave to speak on the basis of this text, "Of the grace which those enjoy who receive the Sacraments."[13]

In other instances the relation of the text to the sermon is very loose. The text merely furnishes the background for Walther's theme; and the sermon is directed to the theme instead of to the text. For example, the text, Luke 2:41-52, the child Jesus in the temple, suggests to Walther the theme: Youthful Piety. His parts develop this theme: (1) Piety is demanded by God; (2) It is possible; (3) It is easy and lovely. In his sermon he really says very little about Jesus in the temple. But he speaks to his subject.[14] Another illustration is his treatment of the story of the draught of fishes, Luke 5:1-11. His theme is suggested by the text: Complete trust and relying on the Word is the right means to victory in the most dangerous trials. His parts develop the theme: (1) In the trials concerning our state of grace; (2) In the trials occasioned by false doctrine.[15] In his treatment of the narrative of the visit of the Magi, Matthew 2:1-12, he takes this theme: Mission work, a Christian obligation. His parts are: (1) Mission work is an obligation for all Christians because love to God and man demand it; (2) Mission work is especially our obligation because we have the means of transportation, the money, and because we owe something to the

---

[13]C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille (zweite Auflage; St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1882), p. 93. Hereafter this work is referred to as Epistel Postille.

[14]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 109.

[15]Ibid., p. 446.

Indians.[16]

This loose use of the text at times leaves the text no more than a pre-text. For example, Walther uses the good text, Romans 4:25, as the basis of his sermon for second Easter Day, but ignores the content of his text in favor of this theme and parts: Christ's vindication through His resurrection, (1) It reveals Christ's innocence; (2) It forcibly proves his divinity.[17] Taking the rich text, Galatians 3:23-29, Walther employs this theme and parts: Why can and should Christians begin also the new year with praise to God? (1) Because in looking back over the past year they find only reasons to praise God; (2) Because in looking forward to the coming year they find only cause to praise God. Although structurally this theme and parts is all right, Walther does not use the rich material in the text as an aid in developing the sermon. In part I, he makes comparisons between the poverty of the unbeliever and the riches of the Christian, and in part II he assures the congregation of the continuing faithfulness of God.[18] Again, using the good text for the Festival of the Ascension, Acts 1:1-11, Walther ignores the text material in favor of a topical discussion of the glorious ascension, its meaning and fruit and power.[19] On the basis of John 2:1-11

---

[16]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 59.

[17]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 205.

[18]Ibid., pp. 47-53.

[19]Ibid., p. 249.

he writes a good sermon on marriage; the only link his subject has with the text is that Christ was invited to the marriage.[20] In his Easter sermon on Mark 16:1-8, Walther preaches an excellent sermon on the great comfort of the resurrection. But he does it without mentioning a word about his text in his sermon.[21] He does the same thing in his Ascension Day sermon on Mark 16:14-16.[22] The crassest example of his ignoring the text is when he reads the Easter Gospel, Mark 16:1-8 and then preaches to this theme: The well-founded hymn of triumph of the Christian at the empty grave of Jesus: "Death is swallowed up in victory."[23] In his sermon on the healing of the man deaf and dumb, Mark 7:31-37, Walther takes the theme: "Of the significant importance of the Holy Sacraments for the Christian's faith and life. His parts are: (1) Holy Baptism; (2) The Lord's Supper. The only thread of connection, if thread there is at all, between the sermon and the text is that as the Sacraments are outward signs, so was also the activity of Jesus in spitting, touching the man's tongue, and putting his finger into his ear. Walther uses this argument in part I, but part II comes through without the benefit of the support of the text![24]

---

[20]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 61-65.

[21]Ibid., pp. 157-163.

[22]Ibid., pp. 193-198.

[23]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 279.

[24]Ibid., pp. 515-522.

This evidence leads me to the conclusion that while Walther does at times preach good, expository sermons, he is more concerned with preaching to a subject, using whatever help the text can give him to accomplish his goal for the sermon.

A second observation is Walther's versatility in the use of the text. Preaching on the same texts year after year, he developed spiritual insight into the text which brings variety to his sermons on the same text. This ability, I think, is one of the virtues of Walther's preaching which deserves emulation.

The following are some of Walther's themes for the Christmas Gospel, Luke 2:1-14: "The freedom established with God through the incarnation of the Son of God";[25] "The birth of the Child of Bethlehem, the reopening of paradise for all men";[26] "The birth of Christ an eternal ground of eternal praise of God for all men";[27] "The incarnation of God, an important work of God";[28] "That we find in Bethlehem what we once lost in paradise";[29] "Had not a child been born for us, we would all have been lost";[30] "The birth of Jesus, the

---

[25]C. F. W. Walther, Festklaenge, edited by C. L. Janzow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892), p. 27.

[26]Ibid., p. 37.

[27]Ibid., p. 47.

[28]Ibid., p. 58.

[29]Ibid., p. 71.

[30]Ibid., p. 82.

greatest proof that God is love";[31] "God's good will to all men, the precious fruit of the birth of Jesus Christ."[32]

The second question of this section concerns Walther's exposition of the text. Although Walther never makes a studied attempt to let his hearers know that he has learned Greek and Hebrew, he often does bring out in his sermons the intent of the words in the original. Preaching on 1 Timothy 1:15, he interprets the words, "This is a faithful saying" correctly as meaning, "It is absolutely worthy of being relied upon."[33] He has the following apt commentary on the words from Philippians 4:7, "The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus":

> The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall enter our hearts; for that is the peace in the midst of a warfare which will guard our heart and mind, our will and understanding, like a wall which reaches to heaven so that neither the flesh, nor the world, nor the devil can rob us of our treasures, and we will not fall from our fortress [und wir nicht entfallen aus unserer eigenen Festung].[34]

Walther shows nice exegetical sense also when preaching on James 1:22, "Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only." He points out that the term Word does not refer here to the Law but to the Gospel because the next verse terms it "the law of liberty." That the word doer implies faith he demon-

---

[31] Ibid., p. 109.

[32] Ibid., p. 129.

[33] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 35.

[34] Ibid., p. 29.

strates by pointing to verse 25: "This man shall be blessed in his deed."[35] On 1 Corinthians 4:1 he notes that the term "ministers of Christ" means "Christ's rowers."[36] Preaching on Luke 18:9-14, Walther interprets the words: "God be merciful to me a sinner" as "God be reconciled with me, a sinner."[37] Preaching on the Good Shepherd, John 10, Walther brings out the force of the article when he interprets, "I am the one (or only) good Shepherd."[38]

Although for the most part Walther's exegesis is quite exact, there are times when one questions his interpretation. In the story of the marriage of the king's son, Matthew 22:1-14, he presses the parable when he refers the marriage to the wonderful union of God and man in the God-man.[39] Again, on the text, Matthew 22:34-46, in giving the exegesis of the words, "Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool," Walther works with the picture of the atonement as the payment of a debt instead of using the imagery of the victory over the tyrants.[40] In his sermon for the Festival of the Nativity of St. John, Luke 1:57-80, Walther seems disturbed over the fact that in this sermon John might be vener-

---

[35] Ibid., pp. 245-246.

[36] Ibid., p. 25.

[37] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 277.

[38] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 312.

[39] Ibid., p. 609.

[40] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 316.

ated. Discussing the text he comments:

> All this did not happen so that John would be venerated, but Christ whom he should preach about and reveal . . . . Isaiah had to announce the coming of John. We should see from this that the sending of Jesus Christ was decreed already in eternity. Gabriel had to announce the coming of John. We should see that all the heavenly hosts had to serve Christ. Even in the womb of his mother, John was filled with the Holy Ghost and his joy. We should see that at his miraculous conception Christ was anointed with the Holy Ghost without measure. In a miraculous way an old woman must be John's mother. We should see that we are correct in believing that Christ is born of a virgin by the overshadowing of the Holy Ghost.[41]

Commenting on the words, John 16;21, "A woman when she is in travail has sorrow because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembers no more the anguish for joy that a man is born into the world," Walther says: "That is also the case with the joy of faith. Without the labor pains of true repentance, it also does not come into the world."[42] On the basis of the words from Zechariah 9:17: "Corn shall make the young man cheerful, and new wine the maids," Walther makes an easy but dubious switch to the Lord's Supper which does not make children, but young men and women, strong in the faith and full of power.[43]

Nor is Walther liberated from the use of the allegorical method. Bartimaeus becomes an example of spiritual blindness.[44] He also spiritualizes the story of the Wedding at

---

[41] Ibid., p. 369.

[42] Ibid., p. 178.

[43] Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 181.

[44] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 194.

Cana, when he shifts from Mary's need for wine to man's need because of sin.[45] In the deaf-mute, Mark 7:31-37, he sees a picture of all men as they are by nature, deaf to the Word and dumb in praising God. But if in his misery man turns to Christ, Christ receives him.[46] His use of allegory is full blown in the following two examples: The story of the raising of the widow's son at Nain, Luke 7:11-17, proceeds as follows: The city of Nain is the world; the young man is every man before Christ awakens him; the coffin is the circumstances in which everyone finds himself in the world; the bearers are the worldly friends and relatives; the cemetery is eternity; the grave is hell; the weeping widow, together with the people who go with her mourning the dead man, is the holy Christian Church which alone is sympathetic to the misery of the spiritually dead.[47] In true scholastic fashion, Walther finds in the story of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Mark 8:23-27, a picture of the Church, which carries the heaven-bound pilgrims over the dangerous sea of the world. The captain of the ship is Jesus, its head and Lord; the ship has sailors, the preachers and other servants of the Church; the treasures which the ship carries are God's Word and grace; the ballast of the ship are the worldly possessions which come

---

[45] Ibid., p. 120.

[46] Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 281.

[47] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 558.

to Christians (except on page 147 where the ballast becomes atheism, naturalism, false doctrine, enthusiasm, and a false union); the anchor is hope; the mast, the cross; the banners, the Confessions.[48]

My impression is that Walther is not the studied exegete like Maclaren or Stoeckhardt. He is rather the dogmatician who is concerned that facets of truth be clearly perceived and, at the same time, the bold witness who wants through preaching to effect a saving encounter between God and man.

Nor is Walther to be classed among the great textual preachers. He is rather a thematic preacher who gets his theme from his text, but who then develops his theme, using whatever aids the text can provide him. His sermons, therefore, for the most part, are discussions of a subject rather than discussions of a text.

This is not to say that Walther is not a good preacher. He is just not the best of textual preachers; but as a model writer of a pulpit discourse he has few peers because to his pregnant thoughthe brings an exemplary style.

---

[48] Ibid., pp. 142-151.

CHAPTER XI

THE STYLE OF THE SERMON

One needs read only a few of Walther's sermons to find that one of the qualities that makes him a top-ranking preacher is his mastery of style. He not only has something to say in his sermons, but he also writes with consummate skill. This fact reflects not only a good background in the art of communication but also careful craftsmanship on his part.

That Walther worked hard on the form of his sermons is attested both by his own testimony and by the evidence which his extant sermon manuscripts give. The utter seriousness with which Walther looked upon the writing of sermons is reflected in a letter to Wyneken, December 21, 1871, in which he says: "I am, as always, in great distress, for I must preach again."[1] At the time of the 350th Jubilee of the Reformation, in a letter of October 16, 1867, Walther writes to his son-in-law, Stephanus Keyl:

> God grant that we may speak with joy at the coming festival. I am still in great sadness and distress of soul. Hence I reflect with fear upon the festival day. Remember me in your prayers. . . . I have quite completed my sermon, but it so displeases me that I wish I were not compelled to deliver it. With respect to sermons, one again and again experiences: "So it is not of him that willeth or of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." Help to call upon God, that he may aid me at least not to spoil the festival; I,

---

[1]Martin Guenther, Dr. C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1890), p. 163.

too, will not forget you.[2]

When Walther was about to embark upon one of his trips, Stephanus Keyl requested that he preach for him. To this Walther replies:

> I do not as yet want to promise that I will preach for you, although I do not see how I can avoid the impression that I am lazy if I do not preach during the coming weeks. I feel sorry for the congregation when I preach a sermon patched together while I am traveling. Again, I have fear of bringing shame upon our college, our presidium, our Synod, and our Church with such a sermon, and you know what a poor extemporizer I am.[3]

The care with which Walther prepared himself for preaching is described by Pastor C. A. Brauer, a colleague of Walther:

> Almost without exception he writes out his sermons word for word, and continuously corrects them, so that his manuscript much of the time is filled with additions and improvements made on the margin and between the lines. He also memorizes his sermons word for word with painstaking care. On Sunday morning he arises at four o'clock, refreshes himself with a cup of coffee prepared by his attentive wife, and zealously memorizes until it is time for the service. He confided that this painstaking memorizing caused him much trouble and that he wishes he had not fallen into the habit of memorizing his sermons.[4]

Fuerbringer corroborates this testimony to Walther's careful revising of his manuscripts. He adds: "It seems as if he felt that he could never do full justice to the presentation of the matter."[5]

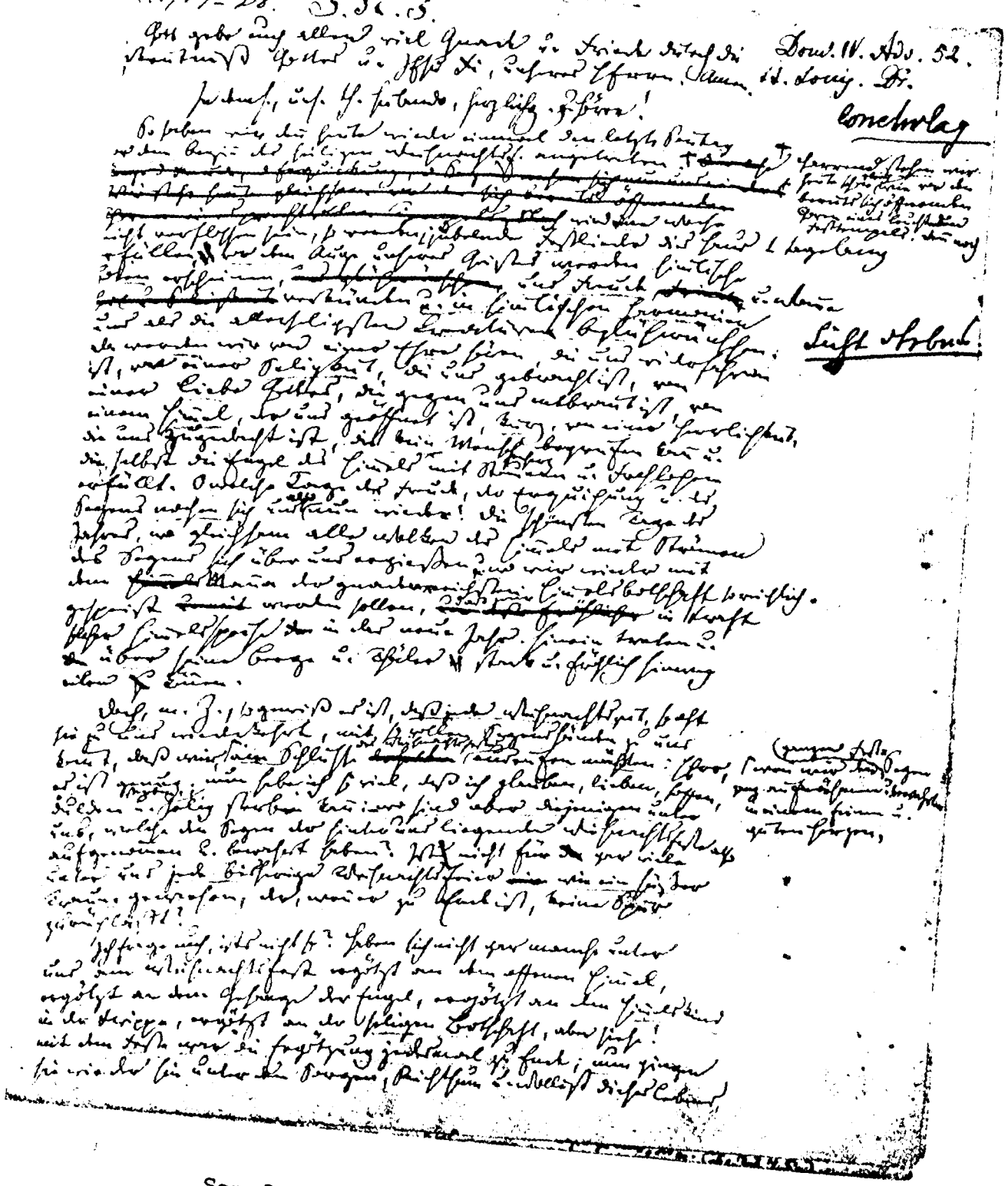
---

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 164.

[4] Ibid., pp. 162-163.

[5] Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer, 80 Eventful Years (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), pp. 85-86, notes that of Stoeckhardt's manuscripts which he saw, he did not recall that he noticed a single correction. A large number of manuscripts of Walther's sermons can be found in the Concordia Historical Institute, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.



Sample of Walther's sermon manuscript

Julius Friedrich, whose diploma was the last which Walther signed,[6] also testifies to Walther's diligent labor on his sermon manuscripts:

> In his work Walther was scrupulous and painstaking almost to a fault. One would think that a man of his stupendous learning could write his sermons and essays with fluency and ease. But this was not so with Walther. He told us students: "You, my friends, may think that I am able to write my sermons, etc., without much study or effort. That is not the case. I can assure you that I must wrest every sermon from the Lord with fervent prayer and hard work. The children of my pen are all born in great travail." It was my privilege to serve as Walther's private secretary--amanuensis he called me--for one year, and thus I had ample opportunity to observe him in his work. I have seen manuscripts from Walther's hand where words or phrases were stricken out four or five times and replaced by other expressions. He weighed every word carefully in order to bring out correctly the thought which he desired to express.[7]

As a result of his painstaking work on his sermons, Walther's sermons are, first of all, clear. Various factors contribute to give his sermons clarity. First, his language is simple. Although his sermons sink deep into theological thought, Walther's sermons have the simplicity of expression of the Small Catechism.[8] That Walther is thinking in the

---

[6]Julius A. Friedrich, "Dr. C. F. W. Walther," Ebenezer, edited by W. H. T. Dau (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922), p. 39.

[7]Ibid., p. 37.

[8]Cf., for example, the material in Walther's sermon on predestination, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille (9. Auflage; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1870), hereafter referred to as Evangelien Postille, with the material in Martin Luther, Kleiner Katchismus, edited by Johann Conrad Dietrich (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1902), pp. 189-196.

An exception to this rule is his six-fold catalogue of sins, Evangelien Postille, p. 199, and Amerikanisch-Lutherische

thought forms of the Catechism as he writes his sermons is evidenced also by the fact that he uses Catechism proof texts quite frequently.[9] Although at times he quotes from the Lutheran Confessions, one can assume that the laity of Walther's day had a better acquaintance with the Confessions than do people today.[10]

Walther achieves clarity also through the use of topic sentences at the beginning of paragraphs and by the use of transitional words and phrases. So consistently does Walther employ these rhetorical devices that one can readily scan his sermons by following the lead of his topic sentences and his transitions.

Epistel Postille (2.Auflage; St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1882), pp. 132-133, hereafter referred to as Epistel Postille. The source for the list of sins is Johann Guilielmi Baier, Compendium Theologiae Positivae, curavit Carol. Ferd. Guil. Walther (In urbe Sancti Ludovici: ek officina Synodi Missouriensis Lutheranae, 1879), II, 320-327.

[9]Compare with passages on natural man, Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 113-114 with the list in Luther, op. cit., pp. 91-92; the passages on the demands of the Law, Evangelien Postille, p. 249, with Luther, op. cit., p. 92; the passages on justification by faith, Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 250-251, with Luther, op. cit., p. 180; and the passages on the universal will of grace, Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 91, with Luther, op. cit., pp. 190-192.

[10]For example, in support of private confession in his sermon, Evangelien Postille, p. 320, he quotes "Augsburgische Konfession, "Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (4.Auflage; Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1959), XI. XXV and "Apolgie der Konfession," Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (4.Auflage; Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1959), XII. In his sermon on predestination, Evangelien Postille, pp. 271-278, he quotes "Konkordienformel," Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche (4.Auflage; Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1959), XI, 5. 8. 88.

Another aid to clarity which Walther uses is the judicious use of illustrations. By far the majority of Walther's illustrations are taken from the Scriptures. Illustrating the ministry of the angels he uses the Catechism examples of the angels and Lot, the angels guarding Job's house, the ministry of angels to Daniel, the three men in the fiery furnace, and Peter and John.[11] David, Manasseh, Peter, and the thief on the cross are men who found forgiveness.[12] To show that a person cannot find happiness outside of Christ, Walther uses the examples of David, Judas, Solomon, and a German king who laid aside his crown to seek happiness in Christ.[13] Warning his young people against succumbing to temptation he says that temptation is like a net filled with berries which the bird eagerly devours only to be caught.[14] And young people of the world are like a gardener who plucks buds from his fruit trees in spring only to find the trees fruitless in the fall.[15] The Lord's Supper seals the forgiveness of sins to us as if a man not only said, "Your debt is paid," but put into our hand the ransom price.[16]

---

[11]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 382. Cf. Luther, op. cit., pp. 118-119.

[12]C. F. W. Walther, Licht des Lebens, edited by C. J. Otto Hanser (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905), p. 666.

[13]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 142.

[14]C. F. W. Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, edited by H. Sieck (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892), p. 286.

[15]Ibid., p. 288.

[16]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 521.

Of all the rhetorical excellencies of Walther's sermons, I regard the unity of his sermons as of first importance. Almost without exception his sermons have unity of subject, unity of goal, and unity of mood. One needs only scan a volume of Walther's sermons to see how consistently his themes are unified. Moreover, he clings tenaciously to this singleness of subject throughout his sermon. Every other part of the sermon is made to serve the demands of the theme. Consequently, Walther takes his introductory thought from his theme. For example, using the theme: "What must a man do that he may enjoy Christ's glory?" his introduction deals with Christ's glory.[17] For the theme, "The beginning of true faith," Walther asserts in his introduction that many who think they have true faith really do not have it.[18] Troubles outside the church serves as the introductory thought for a sermon, "Troubles inside the Church."[19] These examples could be multiplied but all would demonstrate that Walther consistently takes the thought for his introduction from the theme itself.

Moreover, Walther knows the art of reinforcing his theme as he moves through the sermon. For example, in a Christmas sermon he uses this theme: "Why should we remain with our childhood faith in the Christmas mystery?" At the end of each

---

[17] Ibid., p. 120.

[18] Ibid., p. 616.

[19] Ibid., p. 151.

part he has a paragraph of application beginning with the question: "Do we want to, dare we, can we give up our childhood faith in the mystery concerning Christ?"[20] Similarly, in his sermon on Romans 12:1-6, Walther takes for his theme: "Important duties Christians have as God's priests." In the introduction he establishes the fact that we are priests. In the body of the sermon he keeps reminding us that we are to offer ourselves to God, to separate ourselves from the world, and to show humility and love to our brethren because we are priests. In his last sentence he says that in eternity we will stand before God as priests and kings to offer eternal sacrifices of praise.[21]

Walther also uses the conclusion of his sermon to bring the theme into focus for a final time in the sermon. For example, in his sermon on John 6:1-15, Walther has this theme: "Christ is an altogether different Savior from the one the foolish world desires." He concludes his sermon with these thoughts, all of which return to the main thought of the sermon:

> And now in closing I ask you, my dear hearers, could we be served if we had a Savior who could make us all rich and equal here on earth, but who in the hour of death would take leave of us and leave us alone, ... Therefore, what could we wish more than to have a Savior who here gives us food and clothing and there proves to be a gracious judge who gives eternal life.[22]

---

[20]C. F. W. Walther, Goldkoerner (Zwickau: Druck und Verlag von Johannes Heermann, 1901), pp. 1ff.

[21]Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 64ff.

[22]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 246.

However, Walther's sermons do not only have unity of subject but also unity of object or goal. He often follows the good practice of telling in plain words what the goal of the sermon is. In his sermon on the marriage of the King's Son, Matthew 22:1-14, Walther states at the end of the introduction: "Let us now hear this sermon to warn and awaken us all."[23] Again, at the conclusion of his introduction to the sermon on Simeon's great faith, Luke 2:22-23, Walther says that if the doctrine of justification by grace really lived in our hearts, that would also awaken in us Christian virtues. He then continues: "To attain to this goal, let me speak to you on the basis of the Gospel lesson of the sure and comforting courage of a believing Christian."[24] In a sermon whose goal is comfort, Luke 15:1-10, Walther's final words of his introduction are: "in our today's Gospel we see how Christ truly faithfully seeks the straying and the lost. On this lovely, friendly truth let us now pasture our souls."[25]

But even without benefit of such introductory remarks, many, but not all, of Walther's themes themselves have the good quality of stating the goal of the sermon. The following are some themes selected at random: "Why the words, 'Him to whom much is given of him shall much be required,'

---

[23]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 323.

[24]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 165.

[25]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 229.

should serve to humble and warn us";[26] "The precious and comforting doctrine of the Gospel of the justification of a man before God";[27] "To what are we encouraged because Christ comes to us through his Word of grace?"[28] "All those not for Christ are enemies of his kingdom";[29] "You must come to Jesus";[30] "Baptism, the most comforting thought of Christians on New Year's Day."[31]

The point that is significant here is that Walther clings rather tenaciously to the goal which he has set for himself in the theme. Now this practice has by-products, some good, some less so. One good result is that his sermons have a unity of mood about them. His sermons whose goal is doctrine, are didactic in mood. In these sermons Walther establishes the truth beyond a doubt and combats arguments against the truth. A good example is his synodical sermon on 2 Timothy 1:13-14, with this theme and parts: "Why should we at all times especially also in our time hold to the confession of the true Church with unyielding faithfulness?" (1) Because in doing that we are doing nothing else except holding to God's Word itself; (2) Because in that way we are guarding our

---

[26]Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, pp. 147ff.

[27]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 505.

[28]Ibid., p. 10.

[29]Ibid., p. 227.

[30]Walther, Goldkoerner, p. 154.

[31]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 86.

freedom from servitude to men in matters of faith and conscience.[32] Similarly also his sermons intended to rebuke sin are often an unrelenting denunciation of sin.[33] His sermons that are to encourage to a godly life have this as their overruling goal.[34] His sermons of comfort are characterized by their helpful and hopeful note.[35]

Although Walther's ability to stick to a goal and to maintain a dominant mood in his sermons is one of his great virtues as a preacher, it may also well be the cause of one of the serious weaknesses in some of his sermons. That weakness is his failure at times to preach the specific Gospel. And by the specific Gospel I mean the telling of the story of the sacrificial life, death, and resurrection of Christ for the sins of the world. This weakness seems to occur particularly in didactic sermons in which Walther is trying to establish the truthfulness of the assertion in his theme. His sermon on 1 Peter 2:11-20 illustrates this weak-

---

[32]Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, pp. 331ff.

[33]Cf. Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 132ff., theme: "Why a Christian should guard against greed"; Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 338ff., theme: "The groundlessness of the hope of salvation after death"; Ibid., pp. 350ff., theme: "The false Christs."

[34]Cf. Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 70ff., theme: "How Christians are to vindicate their faith before the world"; Ibid., p. 228, theme: "What the conviction that we are pilgrims should move us to do."

[35]Cf. Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 194, theme: "The ascension of Christ a sure basis for our faith"; Ibid., p. 159, theme: "The great comfort lying in Jesus Christ's resurrection." In general, Walther's festival sermons, so rich in doctrine, have the dominant mood of encouragement for Christians.

ness. Walther's theme is "Why should Christians be subject to the government?" His two parts in this sermon are: (1) Because government is an ordinance of God; (2) Because it is his will that his ordinance be held sacred, even if administered by wicked men. Although this is a good sermon, it lacks the specific Gospel. Walther's Goal does not seem to call for it. On Luke 14:1-11 he speaks of the incorrect and true observance of the Sabbath, but fails to bring in the cross.[36] This is true also of his otherwise excellent sermon on the text: "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things which are God's."[37]

A third good quality of Walther's style is its dramatic quality. He produces a dramatic effect, first, by using conversation. God says to man in the Gospel:

> You have indeed sinned grievously, excited my wrath many times, deserved hell a thousand fold; but, behold, just this your indescribably great woe troubled me; my heart broke on account of your distress; your sins against my holy law shall therefore be forgiven you for the sake of Jesus Christ, my dear Son; only come and believe the Gospel.[38]

---

[36] Ibid., pp. 306-311.

[37] Ibid., pp. 339-344. Cf. also Walther, Goldkoerner, pp. 167ff., theme: "Of the evident danger of being misled"; Ibid., pp. 20ff., theme: "The Church, a ship sailing from place to place"; et al. One is surprised to find this fault in Walther because of his own insistence that in his preaching he wants to be sure that every person hears enough of the way of salvation so that if this should be the last sermon he should hear, he could still find his Savior. C. F. W. Walther, Amerikanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie (St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u.a. Staaten, 1872), pp. 94-95.

[38] Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 615.

The Son with tears speaks thus to the sinner:

> Come here to me, you who are weary and heavy laden, I want to strengthen you; I want to gather you to myself as a hen gathers her chicks under her wing. O, take me as your Savior; renounce the world, renounce sin, and turn in faith to me; choose life, not death.[39]

Walther achieves dramatic effect also by introducing objections which people raise to the course of action he proposes in the sermon. For example, in his sermon on Luke 2:41-52, he indicates that when people hear that as Christians they are to be pious, they say:

> That is asking too much. We are only poor, weak people. God can hardly expect so much of us. God is, after all, a benevolent being who would not begrudge us joy in this world. If, in order to be a Christian, one has to fight so seriously against sin and manifest holiness, a person could not have a happy hour on earth. That is making a most unfortunate person out of a Christian.[40]

Although at times he carries this to extremes, Walther's use of questions also brings dramatic appeal into the sermon. He concludes his sermon on Matthew 24:15-28 with this series of questions:

> Have you, dear hearer, whoever you are, realized already that you are living in the last time so full of danger? Have you already so much insight that you from your own experience know that now, as Christ predicted, many false Christs and false prophets have arisen who, if it were possible, would deceive even the very elect? Have you in this last, sad time already awakened so that you are casting about for the right, unfalsified truth of the Gospel and for the true Christ? Have you already recognized that you are a poor, lost sinner and do you therefore hunger and thirst for a righteousness which avails before God?[41]

---

[39] Ibid., p. 401.

[40] Ibid., p. 110.

[41] Ibid., pp. 664-665. For a list of questions covering a page and one-half, see Ibid., pp. 231-232.

A fourth stylistic excellence in Walther's sermons is beauty of language. This quality seems the hallmark particularly of Walther's sermons for the great festivals of the Church year.[42] One of the most elegant of his sermons, frequently quoted in translation, is his Good Friday sermon on Luke 23:44-48, on the theme: "The incomparable glory of the death of Jesus Christ." Here is a sample from this sermon:

> O let us, my hearers, not be ashamed of the thief on the cross. He calls the crucified his Lord and believes in his heavenly kingdom, although before his eyes he sees no crown of gold but a crown of thorns, instead of a scepter, only nails, instead of purple, only a body dripping with blood, instead of a throne, a cross, instead of ministering angels, only murderers and blasphemers.[43]

Notice in the following selection the imagery in the first part and the many paradoxes in the last part:

> There is on earth an amazing kingdom which is small indeed, but whose jurisdiction covers the world. It has its secret members in all the kingdoms of the world. There is an amazing nation in which all the languages of the earth are spoken. It is gathered from all the nations of the earth; yet it lives under one king by one code in lasting peace, enlivened by one Spirit. There is an amazing city among whose citizens are slaves and free, rich and poor, kings and beggars; yet they are all equal, equal in wealth, equal in power, and equal in the hope of the glory which they await. There is an amazing temple which all the world knows, into which all the world is invited to enter; yet which no mortal eye has seen. Founded upon an eternal foundation, it is erected of unknown stones and is supported by invisible pillars. There is an amazing general who

---

[42]Guenther, op. cit., p. 177, testifies to this also when he says that on the church festivals many of the educated of St. Louis, though unchurched, came to hear Walther, not for his content, but for his beautiful form.

[43]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 270.

> without weapons goes through the world. Although continually warred against by the whole world, hell, and traitors in his own midst, he is nevertheless unconquered. Yes, he is victorious even in defeat, triumphant even in death. There is an amazing fellowship among men; they are united by a mysterious bond; it is the most despised in the eyes of the world, but in the eyes of God, his most precious treasure. They seem to be forsaken by God, and yet they are the only ones in whom God dwells. They are always anxious about their sins, and they are the only ones who have the forgiveness of sins. They consider themselves the greatest sinners, and yet they are the only ones who are clothed with a righteousness which avails before God. They pass for the greatest fools, and yet, enlightened by the light of Truth, they are the only ones who are truly wise. The world considers them the scum of humanity and would gladly be rid of them. And they are the only ones for whose sake the world still stands. They seem to be the poorest, and yet they are the only ones who have true treasures, who alone can make the poor world rich, who alone possess the true remedy for all the misery of the world and the fear of death, and to whom alone the keys of heaven are entrusted.[44]

A third illustration will suffice:

> On this day many years ago the most holy himself died the death of a sinner in order that the sinner might live. This day the Almighty himself was conquered by the power of darkness that weak men, conquered by the depths of darkness, delivered from its power, might triumph eternally. This day even for him whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting, came to the end of his days that salvation might be brought again to fallen mankind. This day the very inexhaustible spring itself, from which the life of all beings flowed, dried up in order to give life to the dead hearts of all sinners. The sun of eternal love set, in order that those who were threatened with eternal darkness could shine in all eternity. The eternal Son of the great God poured out his holy blood in order to extinguish the fire of God's wrath over the sins of men.[45]

A final noteworthy mark of Walther's style is that it is personal. In his preaching Walther is far from the religious

---

[44]Walther, Evangelien Postille, pp. 204-205.

[45]Ibid., p. 153.

philosopher who spins abstract discourses to amaze his hearers with their profundity. He is always a pastor, a curate of souls, a shepherd concerned for his flock. One feels this personal note particularly in his confirmation addresses. With what warmth of affection he speaks to the children; how, like a father, he pleads with them to remain faithful to their baptismal vow!

Walther secures this personal note not only by his frequent use of personal pronouns, but also by his appeal to the experience of people. Making the point that earthly wealth really cannot bring happiness, Walther continues:

> I ask you who want to know nothing of the lamb's sacrifice; is it not true? Are you children of this world happy? Has earthly wealth which you have chased, the pleasures of the world which you enjoy, the honor in men's eyes, really made you happy? In the midst of all your earthly glory, do you not often hear a voice in your heart which says to you that there is a holy God whom you do not serve, about whose commandments you are unconcerned, who will some day drag you into his court?[46]

In a sermon on making excuses, Walther says:

> I ask you, dear hearers, to go into your heart. Is it not so? Are you not often persuaded through the Word of God that everything isn't as it ought to be with you? . . . Don't you at times think that it ought to be different? . . . Then a battle takes place within the individual. One voice of his heart says: "Hurry and save your soul." . . . While another voice says: "Yes, if you were in other circumstances, you could indeed conquer all, but for you this is impossible. You have no time for it. You want to build a house, you want to buy land. . . ."[47]

---

[46]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 195.

[47]Walther, Licht des Lebens, p. 410.

In a confirmation address Walther appeals to personal experience to witness to the truth of what he is saying:

> Have you not often experienced how God himself mightily knocked on your hearts at the hearing of Christ's words? Have you not often experienced how God's Holy Spirit moved the foundation of your souls at the hearing of Christ's words, how you began to sigh for grace, how he mightily drew you to God, enlightened you concerning the condition of your souls, reprimanded you on account of your sins? Were you not often overwhelmed with comfort, hope, peace, and joy?[48]

The Form of Walther's Sermons

A discussion of Walther's style would be incomplete without some mention of the form of Walther's sermons. The usual format of the sermon is as follows: At times, prayer; pulpit greeting; address to hearers; introduction; at times, silent prayer or singing of hymn stanza; reading of text; statement of background of text; statement of theme and parts; at times, prayer; and development of parts.

Although Walther regularly begins his festival sermons with a rather lengthy prayer, his practice on ordinary Sundays is to begin with a pulpit greeting. Among those which Walther employs are the following: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and in love, be with you all. Amen";[49] "Heavenly

---

[48]Walther, Evangelien Postille, p. 143. I regard this appeal to experience as another of the excrescenses of pietism in Walther's preaching. Pietism laid a great stress on religion as something which is felt.

[49]Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, p. 115.

Father, sanctify us in thy truth. Thy word is truth";[50] "The grace of our dear Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Heavenly Father, and the comforting fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with you all";[51] "God give you all much grace and peace through the knowledge of God and Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen";[52] "Grace be unto you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ";[53] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will to men."[54]

Walther also has a pleasing variety in his address to his hearers: "Beloved in the Lord";[55] "Dear friends and hearers";[56] "Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus";[57] "In Christ, dearly beloved hearers";[58] "Dear Festgenossen";[59] "In Christ, precious and beloved brothers and sisters";[60] "Faithful partners in faith and battle";[61] "Dear redeemed con-

---

[50] Ibid., p. 297.

[51] Ibid., p. 305.

[52] Ibid., p. 315.

[53] C. F. W. Walther, Lutherische Brosamen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1897), p. 195.

[54] Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, p. 40.

[55] Ibid., p. 297.

[56] Ibid., p. 282.

[57] Ibid., p. 2.

[58] Ibid., p. 9.

[59] Ibid., p. 21.

[60] Ibid., p. 28.

[61] Ibid., p. 55.

gregation";[62] "Dear congregation";[63] "Through Christ Jesus, our only Mediator and only Savior, dear redeemed hearers";[64] "Beloved in the Lord Jesus";[65] "Honorable and beloved fathers and brethren."[66]

Walther's prayers are a significant part of his sermon. Although occasionally he omits the prayer entirely,[67] quite generally Walther includes a prayer either at the beginning of the sermon, after the statement of theme and parts, or at the end of the sermon.[68] Models of correctness and beauty of form, Walther's prayers serve the good purpose of emphasizing the goal of the sermon. For example, preparing for the sermon on 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7, on the theme: "Why is sanctification so necessary for the Christian?" Walther has this prayer:

> O all-knowing, righteous and holy God, who with eyes of flame sees the innermost part of the heart, who knows those among us who boast that they are Christians, that they are your children, and yet do not follow after sanctification, without which no one will see you, but secretly continue to serve those sins which you hate, Oh, give me the power to show such wretched people from

---

[62] Ibid., p. 138.

[63] Ibid., p. 164.

[64] Ibid., p. 305.

[65] Ibid., p. 365.

[66] Ibid., p. 332.

[67] Walther, Epistel Postille, pp. 292ff.

[68] Cf. his confirmation addresses, e.g., Ibid., pp. 169ff., et al., for illustrations of prayers at the close of the sermon.

> your Word that they deceive themselves, alas, that they deceive themselves about their salvation. Give them the grace to awake to your Holy Spirit, to smite their breasts as lost sons and daughters, truly to repent, and begin a new life in holiness and righteousness which is pleasing to you. Yes, bless your Word in us all. Send true fear into all our hearts; permit none to jest about repentance and true faith; let us stand in holy fear and preparedness so that we may joyfully enter your presence. Amen.[69]

Something that strikes us as strange is Walther's use of the singing of a hymn or of silent prayer after the introduction of the sermon. For example, in an Easter sermon Walther has the congregation sing verse seven of hymn 113 after the introduction.[70] In another Easter sermon he says at the conclusion of his introduction: "Let us now as we today continue our Easter devotions once more call upon the Resurrected in silent prayer."[71] Again, he says: "We unite in a silent and believing Lord's Prayer."[72]

---

[69] Ibid., p. 123.

[70] Ibid., p. 199.

[71] Ibid., p. 206.

[72] Walther, Casual-Predigten und-Reden, p. 30. The Kirchen-Agende fuer Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden (St. Louis: Druckerei der Deutschen Ev. Luth. Synode v. Missouri, O. u.a. St., 1856), p. 30, gives the following instructions: "After reading the Gospel, the pastor leaves (the chancel), and the congregation sings, 'We all believe in one true God.' At the words: 'All Christendom on earth' the pastor ascends the pulpit and begins after the conclusion of the hymn with an ex corde prayer on festival days, and on ordinary Sundays with an apostolic greeting, after which he follows with the introduction of the sermon. After he has indicated his theme at the conclusion of the introduction, he asks the congregation to pray a silent prayer (Vaterunser), which is preceded by the pulpit verse, which he therefore also indicates. After the pulpit verse is sung, the pastor kneels and prays together with his congregation a silent Lord's Prayer; then he arises and says: 'The text. . . .'" Walther's practice, therefore, follows the rubrics of the day.

A part of Walther's sermon which deserves emulation is his statement of the setting of the text. He seldom preaches sermons in a vacuum. At the same time, he does not make the mistake of wasting too many words in establishing the relationship of the text to the immediate and remote context. This is how Walther sets the stage for his sermon on the grand text Isaiah 60:1-6:

> The Jewish church at the time of the prophet Isaiah was in sad circumstances. The number of believers had melted away to such an extent that Isaiah says in the first chapter: "And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in the vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the Lord of Hosts had left to us a very small remnant, we should have been a Sodom and we should have been like Gomorrah." Isaiah 1:8.9 . In the sixth chapter he compared Israel to a leafless oak or linden tree, with only its trunk standing. And to this the prophet added the prediction that the people would be led captive to Babylon. All this had crushed the spirit of the few believers. Troubled, they asked: "How? Has the promise of the blessing of all nations come to an end? Do we hope in vain for its fulfillment?" To this our text gives a joyous and faith-strengthening answer. On the basis of it, I present to you: "The glorification of God through the world-wide preaching of the Gospel."[73]

Turning our attention to the form of Walther's themes and parts, we find, first of all, that Walther's themes are generally good; they are specific, containing both a subject and a predicate. Here are a few examples of good themes: "The circumcision of Christ carries a compelling command to Christians to begin the New Year with joy";[74] "The resurrection

---

[73]Walther, Epistel Postille, p. 59.

[74]C. F. W. Walther, Predigtentwuerfe und nicht ausgefuehrte Predigten und Casualreden, edited by C. L. Janzow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1891), p. 24.

is the sure, immovable ground of faith for the Christian";[75] "The benefit of the Sacrament in times of doubt."[76] However, at times Walther uses a title for a theme. These themes, are, of course, inferior, because they really assert nothing. The following are samples of his use of the theme as a title: "The anointing of Christ for his suffering, death, and burial";[77] "The sin of Judas and its result";[78] "Of the forgiveness of sins."[79]

Generally the relationship between theme and parts in Walther's sermons is good because the parts divide the theme well. However, at times from the view point of the text Walther has a part which is purely inferential. For example, in his sermon on the Christmas Gospel, Luke 2:1-14, Walther has this theme and parts:

> Why should we remain with our childhood faith in the Christmas mystery?
>
> I. It alone brings light in the world's darkness;
> II. It alone brings comfort and help for man's sin;
> III. It alone brings the hope of eternal life.[80]

He can use his text material well for parts I and II, but can only introduce part III inferentially. Walther has no qualms

---

[75] Ibid., p. 75.

[76] Ibid., p. 303.

[77] Ibid., p. 156.

[78] Ibid., p. 186.

[79] Ibid., p. 236.

[80] Walther, Goldkoerner, pp. 1ff.

about using the third part because, as we have noted, he is more concerned about being true to his theme than he is about being true to his text.

At times Walther employs the less desirable divisions: I. How true; II. How important. To cite only two of many possible examples:

Theme: Hindrances to prayer in the Christian life

I. Common hindrances;
II. How to overcome them.[81]

Theme: The Lutheran Reformation the prophesied saving of the Church from the bonds of the Antichrist

I. Let me show you this;
II. Let me show you what a compelling demand lies in this for us to remain true to the Lutheran doctrine.[82]

The obvious fault in this type of outline is that the real sermon parts are in part I, and part II is entirely application.

On the matter of the number of sermon parts, it is evident that Walther uses as many as he needs adequately to develop his theme. Webber notes that in Walther's Gnadenjahr, of sixty-five sermons, forty-eight have two main divisions, fourteen have three, and three have four parts. In his Evangelien Postille, of sixty-nine sermons, forty-five have two divisions, twenty-three have three, and one has four.[83]

---

[81]Walther, Licht des Lebens, pp. 341ff.

[82]Walther, Goldkoerner, pp. 112ff.

[83]F. R. Webber, "Walther in the Pulpit," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (October, 1961), 622.

Without a doubt, therefore, Walther is a consummate stylist. His excellence is reflected most by his avoiding the danger of permitting the beauty of his style to overshadow the substance of his sermon. He clothes the richness of substance in the dress of elegance. And in this he still deserves to be followed as a model by students of the art of preaching today.

CHAPTER XII

WALTHER IN THE PULPIT

Walther's career as a preacher extends over a period of fifty years. From the date of his installation, January 15, 1837, until the date of his resignation on the sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, 1838, Walther served the small flock at Braeunsdorf, in Saxony, Germany. Coming to the United States, he served as pastor of the Dresden-Johannesberg parish from 1839-1841. On Jubilate Sunday he began his forty-six year pastorate of Trinity Church in St. Louis. When Immanuel congregation was organized in 1847, Walther regularly exchanged pulpits with his assistant J. F. Buenger. When Walther was elected to a professorship of Concordia Seminary in October, 1849, Fr. Wyneken, of Fort Wayne, was called as his vicar, while Walther remained first pastor.[1] Assuming his professorial duties, Walther's activity as a parish preacher was curtailed. As head of the joint congregation in St. Louis Walther was obliged to preach thirteen times each year, alternating among the four congregations which eventually formed the Gesamtgemeinde.[2] However, al-

---

[1] W. G. Polack, The Story of C. F. W. Walther (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935), p. 87.

[2] J. L. Gruber, Erinnerungen an C. F. W. Walther und seine Zeit (Burlington: Lutheran Literary Board, n.d.), p. 10, adds that he had the added duty of attending the meetings of the joint congregations of St. Louis, and for this work he received the annual honorarium of $250.00.

though preaching less often in St. Louis, Walther was frequently called upon as a guest preacher and repeatedly preached the sermon for synodical conventions.[3]

During his half century of preaching, thousands heard him deliver his sermons, but, surprisingly, few have thought it significant to give a graphic description of Walther in the pulpit. Therefore, in attempting to describe Walther's pulpit manner, we are forced to piece together shreds of evidence.

As a public speaker Walther did not have the physical advantages of size. Gruber described him simply as a "man of middle height, strikingly lean, but of erect carriage."[4] Fuerbringer says:

> He was a rather small man, about five feet and five or six inches, rather lean--I think he weighed no more than about 140 pounds. Among the Saxon immigrants he was called "der kleine Walther," not only because he was younger, but undoubtedly also on account of his stature."[5]

Theodore Buenger, a nephew of Walther, judges his height at five feet nine inches.[6]

However, other factors compensated in a measure for his lack of size. One of these was his striking features. His

---

[3]C. F. W. Walther, Lutherische Brosamen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1897), pp. 386-576.

[4]Gruber, op. cit., p. 9.

[5]Ludwig Ernest Fuerbringer, 80 Eventful Years (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944), p. 81.

[6]Theodore Buenger, "C. F. W. Walther," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, IX (October, 1936), 73.

remarkable head once caught a sculptor's eye.[7] He had a large forehead. His eyes are described as deep set,[8] fiery and piercing;[9] large, dark, and piercing.[10] He had a hooked nose and a far-protruding chin.[11] Because of a fever in earlier years and pyorrhea in later years, Walther lost all of his teeth.[12] Since he could not become accustomed to artificial teeth it appeared to Gruber "as if his prominent nose almost touched his prominent chin."[13]

Gruber feels that his lack of teeth affected his speech a little, but that he spoke clearly and loud, and articulated well.[14] Fuerbringer agrees that even to his old age Walther's enunciation both in the pulpit and classroom was clear and distinct.[15] Gruber describes the pitch of his voice as a pleasant baritone of medium strength,[16] but Walther himself says that he has a bass voice.[17]

---

[7]Fuerbringer, op. cit., p. 83.

[8]Buenger, loc. cit.

[9]Fuerbringer, loc. cit.

[10]Gruber, loc. cit.

[11]Buenger, loc. cit.

[12]Fuerbringer, loc. cit.

[13]Gruber, loc. cit.

[14]Ibid., p. 20

[15]Fuerbringer, loc. cit.

[16]Gruber, op. cit., p. 20.

[17]Briefe von C. F. W. Walther, edited by Ludwig Fuerbringer

Walther had no flair for the theatrical in the pulpit.[18] Instead his manner was simple and direct. But there was always a seriousness of tone in his voice.

> In the seriousness of his presentation one felt the warm evangelical voice of the heart of a witness to Christ calling everyone to live as God's child in fellowship with the Heavenly Father.
>
> There was nothing sweetish about it. It was a strong, natural voice of experience that spoke out of the joyful conviction of the heart. He reproved and condemned sin with sympathetic regret that the most precious blessings of the Lord were not valued or did not find room in the hearts of many.
>
> Hearing him would quickly raise confidence in him as a man who sincerely loved the Lord and his fellow-man for the Lord's sake.[19]

Dallman adds that his Sunday afternoon lectures were fiery and eloquent.[20] Some of his most impressive sermons were delivered as he held an open book in his hand.[21] Gruber adds:

> He had a good command of language and his clear understanding ruled logically developed material of his sermons. His sentences were clear, easily understood, and pregnant. Never was he at a loss for words. Never did he repeat himself.[22]

(St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1915), II, 50. In a letter to his son-in-law, Stephanus Keyl, he is telling about how he has to call to little Emilie, Keyl's daughter: "I have been compelled to raise my bass voice out of the study window when the little Wildfang absolutely aimed to carry out her will as the highest law of the house."

[18]Gruber, op. cit., p. 20.

[19]F. R. Webber, "Walther in the Pulpit," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (October, 1961), pp. 625-626.

[20]William Dallmann, "Doctor Walther," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, IX (October, 1936), 79.

[21]Gruber, loc. cit.

[22]Ibid.

Although Walther learned his sermons word for word, Gruber feels that these sermons were not as impressive as when Walther spoke ex tempore.

> Only when he spoke ex tempore he exerted an almost uncanny power. His deep earnestness, his great assurance, and, above all, his burning zeal and his deep feeling he was able to implant in his hearer, and with a magnetic power he grasped and ruled over the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Particularly vividly do I recall how on two or three occasions he almost hypnotized me. Things about which he spoke seemed to me to be pictured as under a magnifying glass. Every hill seemed to be an insurmountable mountain and every valley a yawning chasm which threatened to swallow up all of us.[23]

But Walther had a fear of the ex tempore method. However, he did on occasion preach from an outline when the pressure of work did not permit him to write out his sermon in full.[24]

Whatever shortcomings Walther may have had as a public speaker, he did possess in an eminent degree the two chief requisites for a preacher of the Gospel: a genuine conviction of the truth and eternal significance of his Gospel, and a sincere love of people and a burning desire to have them share the blessings of his faith.

---

[23] Ibid.

[24] Cf. C. F. W. Walther, Predigtentwuerfe und nicht ausgefuehrte Predigten und Casualreden, edited by C. L. Janzow (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1891).

CHAPTER XIII

WALTHER IN RETROSPECT

We began our discussion intent on establishing that Walther, the preacher, represents a synthesis of Orthodoxy and Pietism. We saw that Walther entered the scene at a time when the two forces of Orthodoxy and Pietism joined forces in opposing Rationalism. Moreover, Walther himself imbibed something of the spirit of each in his formative years.

That he was influenced by Orthodoxy, Walther would be the first to admit, and with a great deal of pride, too. Moreover, his sermons bear the marks of the influence of Orthodoxy. Walther builds his theology, as we have seen, on the three solas: sola Scriptura, sola gratia, and sola fide.

Each of these is an affirmation of Orthodoxy and, at the same time, a repudiation of Pietism. He proclaimed Scripture alone as opposed to feeling; grace alone against the notion that one must himself establish a degree of contrition; faith alone against any thought of the merit of one's conduct before, in, or after conversion.

But Pietism left its mark on Walther, too, for good and for ill. He learned from the Pietists to accent experience, but he purified that accent. In Pietism experience was viewed in terms of auto-suggestion. Walther's experience is that of a sinner under the influence of Law and Gospel. Again, Walther never lost Pietism's concern for making religion something

personal, a matter of heart and life. His sermons, though strongly didactic, are nevertheless personal, intended to awaken and strengthen faith and love in the heart. So intensely does he feel that Christianity is a matter of personal relationship between a man and Christ that he at times employs mystical imagery to describe this blissful relationship. Moreover, he consistently emphasizes that the end of justification is the new life. Avoiding Pietism's weakness of mixing sanctification and justification, Walther always emphasizes that a genuine faith is active in love. Where there is no love there is not faith, where no faith, no grace; where no grace, no salvation. A cold, intellectual affirmation can never pass for saving faith.

A critical appraisal of Walther's sermons will not close one's eyes to the influence of Pietism which introduced faults into Walther's preaching, namely, his tinge of legalism and his occasional advice to the terrified sinner to prayer for grace without directing him to the Gospel.

Summing up the two-fold influence of Orthodoxy and Pietism in Walther's preaching, it is probably safe to say that Orthodoxy provided the content for Walther's sermons and Pietism gave them their practical bent. The one gave the sermon substance and a solid basis; the other provided their direction.

As to form, we have found that Walther's sermons are more goal centered than text centered. The text suggests the theme for Walther, but from that moment on the theme is

the master of the sermon. His sermon divisions are taken from the theme, but not necessarily from the text. As a result, Walther has sermons which are quite textual and others which use the text only as a point of departure.

As a stylist, Walther does credit to the great age of German literature that produced Goethe and Schiller. His sermons also bear the marks of painstaking care in their exactness and beauty of style. But Walther's chief asset is his ability to maintain unity of subject, goal, and mood. Here he demonstrates his consummate artistry.

But the chief legacy which Walther has left us is his view of the sermon as a confrontation of man by God in his justice and mercy. His sermons leave one with the unmistakable impression that one has been in the Holy of Holies. There he has seen God, the God of Sinai and the God of Golgotha, the God of awful justice and the God of infinite mercy.

In his Homiletische Charakterbilder, Broemel pays this tribute to Walther:

> Walther is as orthodox as John Gerhard, but also as fervent as a Pietist; as correct in form as a university or court preacher, and yet as popular as Luther himself. If the Lutheran Church would again spread its teachings among the people, then it will have to be as faithful and certain in doctrine and as inviting and timely in form as is Walther. Walther is a model preacher in the Lutheran Church.[1]

The hope of the pulpit in the twentieth century lies in

---

[1] A. Broemel, Homiletische Charakterbilder (9.Ausgabe; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1897), p. 307.

its capacity to follow Walther in making the sermon the meeting place between God and man. Under the pall of Rationalism, the nineteenth century Protestant pulpit sold its birth-right for the pottage of the social Gospel. The entire movement did not let man be man, the helpless sinner, nor God be the judging and saving God.[2] There are hopeful signs that Protestantism is returning from its errant ways. Under the impact of Neo-orthodoxy it is beginning to take a realistic view of man as sinner and of God as judge and savior.[3]

Our Lutheran Church in the last century has tried to follow Walther. But our allegiance has not been perfect, for our sermons reflect at times a blurring of the proper distinction between Law and Gospel. Our best tribute to the memory of Walther lies, therefore, in our attempt to follow more closely his theological accents. Then, under the preaching of a God who is terrifyingly just, man will always remain a sinner, and under the preaching of a God who is all-embracing mercy, man may always be a saint.

---

[2]Martin E. Marty, The New Shape of American Religion (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959).

[3]Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter, translated from the German by Amandus W. Loos (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. Works by Walther

Fuerbringer, L., editor. Briefe von C. F. W. Walther. 2 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1915.

Walther, Carl Ferd. Wilh. Amerikanisch-Lutherische Epistel Postille. Zweite Auflage. St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia Verlag, 1882.

-----. Amerikanisch-Lutherische Evangelien Postille. Neunte Auflage. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1870.

-----. Americanisch-Lutherische Pastoraltheologie. St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u.a. Staaten, 1872.

-----. Casual-Predigten und-Reden. Edited by H. Sieck. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892.

-----. Communismus und Socialismus. St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1878.

-----. Die Stimme unserer Kirche in der Frage von Kirche und Amt. Zwickau: Verlag des Schriftenvereins der sep. evang.-luth. Gemeinden in Sachsen, 1894.

-----. Festklaenge. Edited by C. L. Janzow. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1892.

-----. Gnadenjahr. Predigten veberdie Evangelren des Kirchenjahrs. Edited by C. L. Janzow. St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1891.

-----. Goldkoerner. Zwickau: Druck und Verlag von Johannes Heermann, 1901.

-----. Kurzer Lebenslauf des weiland ehrwuerdigen Pastor Joh. Friedr. Buenger. St. Louis: Verlag von F. Dette, 1882.

-----. Licht des Lebens. Edited by C. J. Otto Hanser. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1905.

-----. Lutherische Brosamen. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1897.

-----. Predigtentwuerfe und nicht ausgefuehrte Predigten und Casualreden. Edited by C. L. Janzow. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1891.

-----. Standard Epistles. Translated from the German by Donald E. Heck. Livermore, Iowa, 1958. (Mimeographed)

-----. Standard Gospels. Translated from the German by Donald E. Heck. Livermore, Iowa, 1958. (Mimeographed)

-----. The Controversy Concerning Predestination. Translated from the German by August Crull. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1861.

-----. The Proper Distinction Between Law and Gospel. Translated from the German edition of 1897 by W. H. T. Dau. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1929.

-----. "Vorwort," Lehre und Wehre, IX (February, 1863), 33-46.

Walther, C. F. W. and G. Stoeckhardt. Reden gehalten am Sarge der weiland Frau Caroline Juliane Barthel. St. Louis: Druckerei des Lutherischen Concordia-Verlags, 1881.

B. Works about Walther

Broemel, A. Homiletische Charakterbilder. 9. Ausgabe. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1897.

Buenger, Theodore. "C. F. W. Walther," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, IX (October, 1936), 65-79.

Dallmann, William. "Doctor Walther," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, IX (October, 1936), 79-82.

Delitzsch, Franz. "Letter to relatives of C. F. W. Walther," dated Pfingstmontag, 1887, Lehre und Wehre, XXXIII (October, 1887), 289-290.

Engelder, Theodore. "Walther, a Christian Theologian," Concordia Theological Monthly, VII (October, 1936), 731-743 and (November, 1936), 801-815.

Friedrich, Julius A. "Dr. C. F. W. Walther," Ebenezer. Edited by W. H. T. Dau. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1922.

Fritz, J. H. C. "Walther the Preacher," Concordia Theological Monthly, VII (October, 1936), 743-748.

Gruber, J. L. Erinnerungen an Professor C. F. W. Walther und seine Zeit. Burlington: Lutheran Literary Board, n.d.

Guenther, Martin. Dr. C. F. W. Walther. St. Louis: Lutherischer Concordia-Verlag, 1890.

Janzow, C. L. Life of Rev. Prof. C. F. W. Walther, D.D. Edited by The Revision Board, English Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Missouri a. o. States. Pittsburg: American Lutheran Publication Board, 1899.

Lueker, Erwin L. "Justification in the Theology of Walther," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (October, 1961), 598-605.

Pertus, R. A. "Walther als Prediger," Die Rundschau, May 10, 1911, p. 5, cols. 4-6.

Pieper, Francis. "Dr. C. F. W. Walther as Theologian," translated from the German by John Theodore Mueller, Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVI (December, 1955), 913-928 and XXVII (January, 1956), 25-40.

Piepkorn, Arthur Carl. "Walther and the Lutheran Symbols," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (October, 1961), 606-620.

Polack, W. G. The Story of C. F. W. Walther. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1935.

Preus, Robert D. "Walther and the Scriptures," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (November, 1961), 669-691.

Spitz, Lewis W. "Walther's Contribution to Lutheranism," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (October, 1961). 583-590.

Steffens, D. H. Doctor Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther. Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1917.

Suelflow, August R. "Walther and Church Polity," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (October, 1961), 632-641.

Walker, H. H. "Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther, D.D., the Luther of America," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXIX (Winter, 1957), 171-178.

Webber, F. R. "Walther in the Pulpit," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (October, 1961), 621-626.

C. General Reference Works

Anzeiger des Westens, December 8, 1841, p. 3, col. 6.

Baepler, Walter A. A Century of Grace. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947.

Baier, Joh. Guilielmi. Compendium Theologiae Positivae. Curavit Carol. Ferd. Guil. Walther. 3 vols. In urbe Sancti Ludovici: ek officina Synodi Missouriensis Lutheranae, 1879.

Becker, Sigbert W. "The Gospel," The Abiding Word. II. Edited by Theodore Laetsch. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947. Pp. 347-366.

Bente, F. American Lutheranism. 2 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1919.

Brunner, Emil. The Divine-Human Encounter. Translated from the German by Amandus W. Loos. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943.

Dargan, Edwin Charles. A History of Preaching. 2 vols. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1954.

Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche. Goettingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1959.

Eckhardt, E. Homiletisches Reallexikon. Vol. III. St. Louis: Success Printing Co., 1912.

Elfter Synodal-Bericht der allgemeinen Deutschen Evang.-Luth. Synod von Missouri, Ohio, u.a. Staaten vom Jahre 1863. St. Louis: Synodaldruckerei von Aug. Wiebusch u. Sohn, 1864.

Forster, Walter O. Zion on the Mississippi. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953.

Fritz, John H. C. Pastoral Theology. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1945.

Fuenfzehnter Synodal-Bericht der Allgemeinen Deutschen Evang.-Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio u.a. Staaten vom Jahre 1872. St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1872.

Fuerbringer, Ludwig Ernest. 80 Eventful Years. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1944.

Geihsler, Walter. "The Law and the Gospel," The Abiding Word. I. Edited by Theodore Laetsch. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953. Pp. 105-123.

Hanser, Carl Johann Otto. Irrfahrten und Heimfahrten. Buffalo: Lutheran Publishing Company, 1910.

-----. Geschichte der Ersten ev.-lutherischen Dreieinigkeits-Gemeinde in St. Louis, Mo. St. Louis: Druckerei des Luth. Concordia-Verlags, 1889.

Hoyer, Theodore. "Der Pietismus," Concordia Theological Monthly, VI (July, 1935), 496-501 and (November, 1935), 816-822.

Kavasch, Paul M. "The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod During the Early Years of the Civil War," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XXXI (October, 1958), 65-78 and (January, 1959), 104-109.

Kirchen-Agende fuer Evangelisch-Lutherische Gemeinden. St. Louis: Druckerei der Deutschen Ev. Luth. Synode von Missouri, Ohio, u.a. St., 1856.

Koestering, J. F. Auswanderung der saechsischen Lutheraner im Jahre 1838. St. Louis: Druck und Verlag von A. Wiebusch und Sohn, 1866.

Kurtz, Johann Heinrich. Church History. Translated from the German by the Rev. John Macpherson. 3 vols. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1890.

Latourette, Kenneth Scott. The Nineteenth Century in Europe. Vol. II of Christianity in a Revolutionary Age. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959.

Lenk, Marg. Fuenfzehn Jahre in Amerika. Zwickau: Verlag und Druck von Johannes Herrmann, 1911.

Luther, Martin. Kleiner Katechismus. Gruendlich ausgelegt von Johann Conrad Dietrich. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1902.

-----. Werke. Ca. 100 vols. Weimar: Hermann Boehlau, 1883.

Marty, Martin E. The New Shape of American Religion. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959.

Mundinger, Carl S. Government in the Missouri Synod. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1947.

Neve, J. L. and O. W. Heick. A History of Christian Thought. 2 vols. Philadelphia: The Muehlenberg Press, 1946.

Nichols, James Hastings. History of Christianity 1650-1950. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1956.

Pelikan, Jaroslav Jan, Jr. "Amerikanisches Luthertum in dogmengeschichtlicher Sicht," Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirchenzeitung, VI (July 25, 1952), 250-251.

Protokolbuch der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Gemeinde Ungeaenderter Augsburgischer Confession zu St. Louis, Mo. Concordia Historical Institute, St. Louis, Missouri.

Rambach, Johann Jacob. Erlaueterung ueber die Praecepta Homiletica. Zweite Ausgabe. Gieszen: bey Johann Philip Krieger, 1746.

Schultz, Robert C. Gesetz und Evangelium in der lutherischen Theologie des 19. Jahrunderts. Band IV von Arbeiten zur Geschichte und Theologie des Kthertums. Herausgegeben von Wilhelm Maurer, Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, und Ernst Sommerlath. Berlin: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1958.

-----. "The Distinction Between Law and Gospel," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXII (October, 1961), 591-597.

Sihler, W. Lebenslauf von W. Sihler. 2 vols. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1879 and New York: Lutherische Verlags-Verein, 1880.

Stellhorn, A. C. "Carl Ludwig Geyer," Concordia Historical Institute Quarterly, XII (April, 1939), 3-12.

Stephan, Martin. Der Christliche Glaube. Dresden: Koenigliche Hofbuchdruckerei, 1825.

Stoeckhardt, George. Law and Gospel According to Their Several Effects. Translated from the German by Walter H. Bouman. Valparaiso University Pamphlet Series--No. 9. Valparaiso: n.p., 1946.

Synodal-Bericht der Allgemeinen Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten in Ft. Wayne, Ind., vom Jahre 1869. St. Louis: Druckerei der Synode von Missouri, Ohio und anderen Staaten, 1869.

"The Orthodox Teacher and the Word of God," The Cresset, XXV (March, 1962), 8-20.

Thompson, Ernest Trice. Changing Emphases in American Preaching. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, n.d.

Uhlhorn, Friedrich. Geschichte der deutsch-lutherische Kirche. Vol. II. Leipzig: Verlag von Doerffling und Franke, 1911.

Vehse, D. Carl Edward. Die Stephan'sche Auswanderung nach Amerika. Dresden: Verlags-expedition des Dresdner Wochenblattes, 1840.

Waterhouse, E. W. "Pietism," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics. X. Edited by James Hastings. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1919. Pp. 6-9.

Webber, F. R. A History of Preaching in Britain and America. Vol. III. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1952.